Lessons For All:

Factors Contributing to Early School Leaving in the Northwest Territories
Volume 2 – Summary Report

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LESSONS FOR ALL: FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO EARLY SCHOOL LEAVING IN THE NORTHWEST TERITORIES

Volume 1: COMMUNITY REPORT

Volume 2: SUMMARY REPORT

Volume 3: TECHNICAL REPORT

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PART ONE
THE RESEARCH PROJECT: OVERVIEW & CONTEXT

INTRODUCTION

In January 1991 Lutra Associates Ltd. was commissioned to conduct research to investigate factors which may contribute to early school leaving in the Northwest Territories. The research project was funded by the Canada Employment and Immigration Commission (CEIC), NWT Directorate, under the Federal Government's Stay-In-School Initiative; it was guided by CEIC staff and personnel from the Government of the NWT's (GNWT) Student Support Division, Department of Education.

The research findings are important to parents, educators, governments and community organizations because:

- There is an absence of research and baseline information on early school leaving in the Northwest Territories. Therefore, it has not been possible to fully understand the true nature of the problem or to monitor how it is changing. This research project provides baseline data for these purposes.
- The findings of studies conducted in Canada and elsewhere about students who leave school early have generally been applied to the NWT. This research project will enable educators, governments, parents and students themselves to confirm or refute the appropriateness of these studies to the NWT.
- The Department of Education, Boards and Divisional Boards of Education, communities, schools and/or parents have initiatives underway to address the problem of students leaving school early. This research project will enable some assessment of the appropriateness of these initiatives, and enable these partners in education to make changes which will support and encourage students to stay in school longer.
- For the past two years CEIC has provided Stay-In-School funding to Boards and Divisional Boards of Education and community organizations to encourage students to stay in school. The research findings will enable CEIC and the partners in education to identify projects that should be funded to support NWT youth staying in school.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE AND SCOPE

The objective of the research project was **to improve the understanding of factors contributing to early school leaving in the NWT.** It is hoped that the various partners in the education process will be able to analyse their own situation and apply the findings of this research to their responsibilities for the education of young people in the NWT.

The project is the first of its kind to be undertaken in the NWT to:

- document the opinion and background of students across the NWT who may be at risk of leaving school early or who have left school early,
- review school records maintained on students at risk of leaving school early and early school leavers,
- stage community forums to collect the views of local education authorities and the public on factors contributing to early school leaving,
- involve each NWT board and divisional board of education in a research project on early school leaving,
- train community residents across the NWT to conduct research into early school leaving, and
- jointly involve the Federal Government, the GNWT Department of Education, and regional and community education authorities in identifying the factors contributing to early school leaving in the NWT.

A Steering Committee made up of two representatives from the Canada Employment and Immigration Commission (CEIC) NWT Directorate, two representatives from the GNWT Department of Education, and two representatives from Lutra Associates Ltd., Yellowknife guided the research project. The Steering Committee identified the research objective and principles; reviewed progress and provided input into the research plan; and gave direction for reporting the research findings. Lutra Associates Ltd. was responsible for developing and implementing the various components of the research project.

The scope established for the research project is summarized below:

Output:

- The output of the research would be an NWT profile of factors contributing to early school leaving. While the profile would recognize differences which may exist across the Territories the focus would be on similarities.
- The project would be a pilot study and the methodology would be carefully documented to enable further research, if warranted.
- As a community-based research project, the report would offer a Territorial-community perspective rather than an academic treatise on early school leaving in the Northwest Territories.

Process:

- Literature on early school leaving would be reviewed to provide definition and structure to the research plan for the NWT project.
- The schools and communities invited to participate in the research would be typical of those represented by each board and divisional board of education in terms of school enrolment, attendance and drop-out rates, and grades available. Participating schools would be located in communities with cultural and economic circumstances typical of the region.
- Schools and communities selected to participate in the project would be approved by the board or divisional board of education and the local education authority.
- Students at risk of leaving school early and those who have recently left the system would be the primary information source.
- The Territorial definition of an early school leaver is any student who leaves school and does not return by the next school year, without meeting graduation requirements. There is no single definition of a student at risk of leaving school early. As such, it would be necessary for each school participating in the research to articulate the definition used to identify those students-at-risk who would be eligible to participate in the research project.
- To improve the quality of participation in the research project, resident researchers would be hired in each participating community. Community-based researchers would participate in two training sessions designed to develop familiarity with the subject matter and specific research skills.

METHODOLOGY

The research plan was structured in three phases - Research Design, Field Work, and Reporting. Each phase is discussed in detail in Volume 3: Technical Report.

The 12 NWT schools participating in the research project identified a total of 264 students at risk of leaving school early and 192 students who had left school in the last 12 months who were between 11-19 years of age (Table 1). Depending on the size of the community, a representative sample of 12 to 20 students was identified in each, to make up the total NWT sample of 200. The sample sought a 75% to 25% ratio of students at risk to those who had recently left school.

Table 1: Characteristics of Students Identified For Interview and Those Actually Interviewed

	Students in School		Students Out of School	
	Identified	Interviewed	Identified	Interviewed
TOTAL	264	140	192	58
SEX				
Male	134	81	98	27
Female	130	59	94	31
AGE				
11	6	1	-	-
12-14	82	55	28	8
15-16	112	54	43	18
17-18	63	30	106	29
19+	1	-	15	3
CULTURAL BACKGROUND				
Aboriginal	196	114	150	50
Non-Aboriginal	68	26	42	8

Between March and June 1991 information was collected from 198 students in 10 NWT communities. One hundred and forty (71%) were students identified as being at risk of leaving school and 58 (29%) had recently left school. Seventy-four percent (74%) of the students in school and 78% of those out of school were of aboriginal ancestry. (In 1990, the Department of Education estimated that 72% of the NWT student population was of aboriginal ancestry and only 5% of aboriginal students graduate from Grade 12.) Even though an equal number of male and female students were identified, slightly more males (55%) were interviewed due to a greater reluctance among females to participate in the research project. Over one third (37%) of the student interviews were conducted in four schools in the larger urban centres of Hay River and Yellowknife, 30% in the medium-sized communities of Rae-Edzo, Pangnirtung and Arviat, and 33% in the small, more traditional communities of Fort Liard, Fort Franklin, Aklavik, Gjoa Haven and Clyde River.

A structured student questionnaire delivered by trained, local researchers was used to collect information in face to face interviews. The duration of each student interview was approximately 1.5 hours. The questionnaire was organized under four groups of factors - the home, personal life of students, the school, and the community. While the questionnaire was provided in English, student interviews were partially or completely conducted in an aboriginal language in at least half of the participating communities. Such interviews required trained research staff.

A standardized checklist was used to report information contained in the Cumulative File of each student interviewed. The frequency of comments on the file were documented in the areas of: academic performance, behaviour, attendance, home/school/community,

referrals, and programs recommended. One hundred and ninety-two CUM Files were available for review. Missing CUM Files are attributed to schools losing CUM Files; files not being transferred with the student; or unavailability of the file due to the student's past attendance at a school outside the community.

Exclusive of students interviewed and parents/guardians contacted about student participation in the research, 297 people in 10 communities participated in focus group or local education authority meetings, public forums, radio phone-in shows, school staff and community agency meetings/informal discussions. Two local education authorities were unable to schedule time to provide input into the research.

Quantitative data collected through the student questionnaire and the Cumulative File checklist were compiled on dBase III Plus (MS-DOS) software. Consistent with other elements of the research project, qualitative information collected through forums and interviews were categorized and summarized under four headings - community, school, home, and personal factors contributing to early school leaving. Data are presented in tabular and graphic form. Due to rounding and opportunities for multiple responses, totals may not add up to 100%.

LIMITATIONS

As the first of its kind in the NWT, this research project has limitations. The lack of a Territorial-wide definition of a student at risk of leaving school early meant that students identified by schools as possible participants in the project, were eligible for many different reasons. The only characteristic all had in common was poor school attendance. Since no common set of characteristics was used to identify students, there is no way of confirming if the students participating in this project are typical of NWT students at risk of leaving school early.

The structure and/or the wording of the student questionnaire led to poor response and incomplete data in five areas: 1) leaving home to attend school outside the community, 2) student residences/boarding homes, 3) teen pregnancy, 4) education levels of parents/guardians, and 5) changes in student attitudes about school.

As a comprehensive review of NWT school student records had not previously been undertaken, the quality and consistency of information contained in Cumulative Files was unknown. In fact, the type, nature and extent of information contained in CUM Files varied considerably across the NWT and within various schools. This is verified by the time required to review a Cumulative File - between 10 minutes and 3 hours. Due to the wide variability of CUM File data and the difficulties this posed in terms of collection, compilation and interpretation, CUM File data must be used with caution.

The sample of 198 students (3% of the NWT school population 11 years of age and older in 1990/91) might be considered a rationale for discounting the results. The extensive nature and success of student interviews, the cross-section of students participating in the research, the pilot nature of the project, and comparable methods used in similar research (Mackay et al., 1989) support both the sample size and the findings.

TERMINOLOGY

In this research project, the term "early school leaver" means any student who leaves school and does not return by the next school year, without meeting graduation requirements. A "student at risk of leaving school early" is commonly defined by NWT schools as a poor attender but a number of other characteristics were also used to identify these students (see Volume 3-Technical Report).

All references to "students" (for example, students who have already left school, aboriginal students, students from larger centres) refer only to students who participated in the research project, not to all NWT students. Similarly, all references to "community members" refer only to those individuals living in the 10 communities who participated in the research project rather than all community residents in the NWT.

BACKGROUND TO THE RESEARCH PROJECT

Schooling in the NWT

In 1969, after decades of administration by churches and the Federal Government, the Government of the NWT assumed responsibility for education in the NWT and established the Department of Education. Three years later the first NWT curriculum guide was produced (K-Grade 6).

Since the 1970's, the NWT education system has undergone innumerable changes designed to involve local residents and reflect NWT circumstances. However, it was not until 1980 that the NWT education system we know today, began to take shape. In that year the Legislative Assembly of the NWT appointed a Special Committee on Education to examine education in the Northwest Territories. In its report *Learning, Tradition and Change* (1982), the Special Committee put forth a series of recommendations designed to make the education system more responsive to the varied needs of NWT communities. The Special Committee also called for greater local participation in and control over the education system.

The recommendations of the Special Committee have been realized in a number of initiatives including:

- a clearly articulated philosophy of shared responsibility (*Education in the N.W.T.*, 1989) stating that .... "students, parents and the community nurture the individual student's growth. Together, they will promote the skills, abilities and attitudes each student needs to be a responsible and confident member of this rapidly changing, multi-cultural society."
- a framework for education in the NWT (*Our Students, Our Future: An Educational Framework*, 1991) promoting community-based schooling which incorporates and reflects the child's cultural identity, and endorsing more control of education at the local level.
- the use of curriculum materials pertinent to local languages and cultures in NWT schools,
- more teachers trained and certified in the NWT resulting in more northern teachers in NWT schools,
- School-Community Counsellors who strengthen relationships among students, the school and the community, and
- operational responsibilities for schools in the hands of the 11 NWT Boards and Divisional Boards of Education.

The impact of these and other efforts is difficult to measure and slow to be realized. Educators, administrators, parents and community groups realize that changes to the education system are particularly difficult when much of the population is just beginning to learn about formal education and how the education system operates. The rapidly changing circumstances of the NWT also pose continuous challenges in all areas of the design and delivery of the school instructional program and learning environment. For these reasons, involving all of the partners in the education process - the students, parents, educators, and other community members - is a basic principle underlying all education initiatives in the NWT today.

Early School Leaving in the NWT

The GNWT Department of Education maintains statistical data that provide an overview of the NWT school population. Pertinent data are summarized below.

- School enrolment, like the population of the Northwest Territories, has been steadily increasing for the past 20 years. In the past five years, the enrolment in NWT schools has increased by 7.5% (Table 2).
- Since 1985/86, the school enrolment as a percentage of the population old enough to be in high school, increased from 45% to 51% (Figure 1).
- Over the past five years, the proportional enrolment rate in the primary grades (K-6) has declined but in the junior and senior high grades (Grades 7-12) it has increased. The greatest upward trend is in the senior high grades (Grades 10-12) indicating that more students are staying in school longer (Table 2).
- Although students are staying in school longer, only 12% of the total student enrolment is in the senior high grades (Table 2).

Table 2: Enrolments by Grade as a Percentage of the Total, 1985/86 - 1990/91

Year	85/86	86/87	87/88	88/89	89/90	90/91
Total Student Population	12330	12308	12463	12794	12772	13231
Percentage of Student Population						
K-3	42	41	42	40	39	38
4-6	27	28	27	29	29	28
7-9	19	19	18	19	20	20
10-12	10	11	11	11	11	12
Other	2	2	2	2	2	2

Note: Other refers to the Community Occupational Program (COP), Terry Fox Program, Senior Practical Program (SPP)
Source: GNWT Department of Education, Summary of Enrolments, 30/04/91; 06/02/91

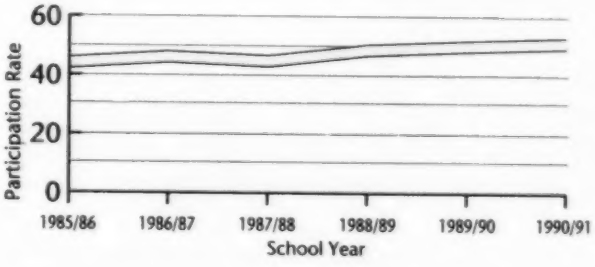


Fig. 1: High School Participation Rate 1985-90 (by Percentage)

Source: Department of Education, GNWT

- Over the past five years, the student withdrawal rate from NWT schools averaged 4% to 5% per year. (The withdrawal rate is the number of early school leavers and students who disappear from the system during a particular year, as a percentage of those who enrolled at the beginning of the school year. The rate does not include students who are known to have transferred to another school.)
- The long-term, compound impact of an annual withdrawal rate of 5% is significant. It means that each year 700 - 800 students leave the NWT school system before graduating from Grade 12.

- The graduation rate for the Northwest Territories is consistently reported at 20% (Figure 2). This compares to a Canadian graduation rate of 70%. (The graduation rate for the NWT is defined as the number of annual Grade 12 graduates as a percentage of 18 year-old population.)

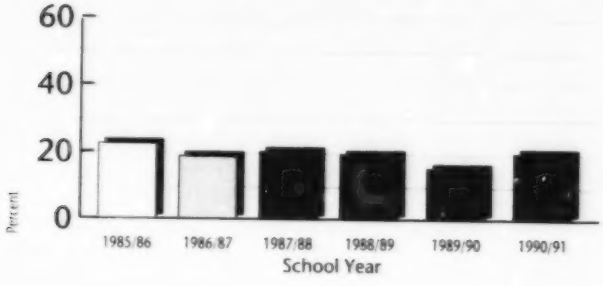


Fig. 2: Grade 12 Graduates as a Percentage of 18 Year-Old Population (by Percentage)

Source: Department of Education, GNWT

- Between 1985/86 and 1989/90, attendance figures improved by 3.3% for schools in the Northwest Territories. While there are good and poor attenders, NWT students attend school an average of 85% of the time (Table 3).
- Land days account for less than 2% of the non-attendance of students at schools across the Northwest Territories (Table 3). Students at urban schools are usually not excused for land days while land days can account for as much as 12.6% of non-attendance at schools in smaller communities.
- Truant days represent a significant proportion of the non-attendance at Northwest Territories schools (Table 3). Truant days are most evident in smaller communities where they can account for as much as 34% of non-attendance.

Table 3: Summary of Attendance, 1985/86 - 1989/90

ATTENDANCE	85/86	86/87	87/88	88/89	89/90
Average Attendance (by Percentage)	82.40	84.20	84.00	85.80	85.10
Land Days (by Percentage)	1.52	1.39	1.41	1.16	1.29
Truant Days (by Percentage)	13.63	9.03	9.29	7.92	8.34

Note: 1990/91 attendance data were not available at the time of writing.
Source: Department of Education, GNWT

The Socio-Economic Context

Early school leaving in the NWT directly and indirectly impacts the socio-economic well-being of the Territories. A glance at some of the NWT's characteristics illustrates this.

- The NWT population estimated at 54,800, is spread over 61 communities of which two-thirds have fewer than 600 residents (GNWT, 1990).
- Per capita income in large centres such as Yellowknife and Hay River is almost two-thirds higher than in small communities such as Rae Lakes and Repulse Bay (GNWT, 1990).
- The average monthly social assistance caseload has grown by about 50% over the past five years (GNWT, 1990).
- Almost two-thirds of the people employed in the NWT today were born outside of the Territories (GNWT,1990).
- The rate of unemployment varies widely from, for example, 4% in Yellowknife and 14% in Iqaluit to 34% in Clyde River and 24% in Nahanni Butte (GNWT, 1989).
- The NWT is a complex and often conflicting socio-cultural environment where seven aboriginal languages and almost as many indigenous cultures interface with a host of other languages and cultures.
- Even though aboriginal people make up 58% of the population and 72% of the school enrolment, only 5% of aboriginal students who start school graduate from Grade 12 (GNWT,1989).
- 45% of the total working age population and 72% of the aboriginal working age population in the NWT is functionally illiterate (i.e. report having achieved Grade 9 or less) (Table 4).
- Among people unemployed in the NWT, 67% have Grade 9 or less (GNWT, 1990).
- The NWT has one of the highest rates of suicide in Canada (GNWT,1990).
- Reports of family violence and other violent crime are on the increase in the NWT (GNWT, 1989).
- Alcohol, drug and solvent abuse are seen as major problems for people of all ages in the NWT (GNWT,1989).

Table 4: NWT Working Age Population and Level of Education

	TOTAL	ABORIGINAL	NON-ABORIGINAL
Persons 15 Years & Over	34,650	19,611	15,039
Grade 8 or Less	32%	54%	4%
Grade 9 to Grade 11	17%	19%	13%
High School Diploma	16%	6%	27%
Certificate or Diploma	24%	18%	33%
University Degree	10%	1%	23%
Not Provided	1%	2%	-1%

Source: 1989 NWT Labor Force Survey - Labor Force Activity, Education & Language, Bureau of Statistics, GNWT, 1990

Every year it is estimated that 30% or 100,000 school aged people across Canada leave school before graduating. In the NWT, the rate is about 80%. If the national school drop-out rate continues, the Federal Government estimates that by the year 2000 there could be as many as one million under-educated, under-trained youth. If the number of NWT youth who leave school early every year is not reduced, there could be as many as 8,000 more under-educated and under-trained NWT youth by the year 2000.

Education is fundamental to improving the socio-economic circumstances of the NWT and its residents. The importance of education, particularly to participation in the labour market, is underscored in a study by the Canadian Labour Market and Productivity Centre (1990). The study states that by the year 2000 high school graduation will be required for 64% of new jobs and of these, 50% will require 17 years of education. How will NWT residents be able to compete for these jobs when so many students leave school early?

What is Known About Early School Leaving?

While this is the first research to investigate early school leaving in the NWT, studies elsewhere provide a general understanding of the subject. The literature provides a range of definitions and indicators of students at risk of leaving school early. For example in the state of Wisconsin, students at risk of leaving school early are described as experiencing difficulty with learning, school achievement, progress toward graduation, or preparation for employment because of social, health, or educational factors. Further, students who may be at risk of leaving school early are identified as those who:

- have been absent from school without acceptable excuses,
- are parents,
- are delinquent (whether in terms of breaking the rules, or having negative behaviour/attitudes), and
- are one or more years behind their age group in the number of credits attained or basic skill levels. (Brodinsky and Keough, 1989)

Recent research into early school leaving in North America indicates that there is a growing consensus in at least the following three areas:

- There is no typical early school leaver and therefore, no one specific definition of an early school leaver.
- Leaving school early is a process rather than an event.
- More and more research on the subject is focusing on the interplay between school structure, and personal, social and family issues and characteristics.

A wide range of studies into early school leaving were reviewed but few cover a jurisdiction as large as the Northwest Territories. There may be a reason for this. It was determined (Wehlage et al., 1986) that large statistical data bases which focus on dropout rates support beliefs that early school leaving is a problem among certain types of populations. For these reasons, Wehlage argues that there is often misrepresentation of the factors related to early school leaving.

Examples of Wehlage's hypothesis are shown in studies of school populations with backgrounds that are different than "mainstream" society, for example, blacks, hispanics and North American Indians. This research often links the low socio-economic status commonly held by these groups to early school leaving. Regardless of ethnic background, other research concludes that growing up in poverty places children at risk for a multitude of problems (Hess, 1989) including dropping out. Among ethnic or cultural groups, research has also identified alienation from the school as a factor in early school leaving, a factor which is often reinforced by school policies and practices (Oakes, 1982). This research also suggests that students from cultural/ethnic minority groups, rather than the school, are often blamed for failure in school (Richardson and Gerlach, 1980). Students from some ethnic/cultural backgrounds are thought not to consider education as an avenue to future opportunities.

Recent research (Wehlage et al., 1986) has recognized that regular comprehensive schools contribute to their students' failure and risk of leaving school early when they refuse to adapt to students' needs or expect students to conform completely to the school. It follows that schools need to clearly identify the characteristics of at-risk students - low achieving, alienated, school-aged mothers, poor youth, those experiencing serious home and family problems - and develop programs and services that meet their particular needs. Radwanski (1987) shows similar characteristics in his profile of the Ontario early school leaver:

- Students from homes with low family income, and parents with low educational levels and occupational status are at greater risk of not completing high school.
- Young people from single parent households are considerably more likely to leave school early than those from homes where both parents are present.
- Early school leavers tend to lag behind other students, fail one or more subjects and be behind in their grade level reading ability.
- Part-time work during the school year in excess of 15 hours each week, increases the likelihood of early school leaving.

There has been no research in the NWT on early school leaving but there have been related studies which provide insights into the subject. A recent study (Dene Cultural Institute, 1991) reports Dene perceptions about education and work. Education is very important to Dene parents and Dene parents seem to have higher expectations for the education of their children than do the children themselves. Both Dene students and adults recognize that a school education is useful to getting further education and training, but a low number of students and adults link school education to getting a job. In the same study, educators identify underdeveloped proficiency in English, absenteeism, and a lack of parental and community cooperation as the main factors which affect the school performance of aboriginal students. Teachers saw the cooperation of parents to be very important in the education process. A study of aboriginal students who left school in Ontario (Mackay et al., 1989) supports the view of these NWT educators.

A study in Northern Alberta (HLA Consultants, 1984) found that the student at risk of leaving school early typically:

- was older (i.e. between 16 and 19 years),
- had been retained in one or two grades,
- had failing grades,
- had average or below average intelligence, and
- had discipline/behavioural problems.

The study found that aboriginal students complete fewer grades than Caucasians before leaving school. In another study (Mackay et al., 1989), the main factor influencing the academic performance of aboriginal school leavers was absenteeism.

A broadly-based statistical survey (Price Waterhouse, 1990) of early school leaving in Canada found that:

- where early school leavers were grouped primarily by characteristics relating to family, cultural or social background, the most common elements amongst the different groups were a profound sense of alienation from the school setting, lack of support from school staff and parents, and lack of financial support.
- the first step in early school leaving is often a gradual withdrawal and failure to become integrated and involved in school activities.
- other factors contributing to withdrawal from school included drug use, working after school, and family or personal problems.

The *Canada Health Attitudes & Behaviours Survey* (King et al., 1984) collected information on the physical and mental health of a sample of 9, 12 and 15 year olds in the Northwest Territories and compared these findings with those of young people of the same age throughout Canada. The survey found that compared to their peers in the provinces young people in the NWT:

- were below the national average for balanced nutrition,
- had an extremely high incidence of cannabis use at the Grade 10 level and above average at the Grade 7 level,
- tended to be less positive than other young Canadians on measures relating to self-image and self-esteem, and
- were less positive in their attitudes towards their parents.

The most recent Canadian survey of early school leavers (Statistics Canada, 1991), explores the environmental, social, attitudinal, personal and economic factors that may contribute to early school leaving. Based on a sample of 9,460 youths, the survey found that:

- almost three out of every ten students have left school because they were bored or preferred to work.
- academic performance was not a major factor in decisions to leave school but early school leavers are more likely to have failed a grade in elementary school than students who stay in school.

The findings from other studies on early school leaving are referenced throughout this report and are confirmed or refuted by the NWT research results.

PART TWO
THE FINDINGS:
FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO EARLY SCHOOL LEAVING IN THE NORTHWEST TERRITORIES

It is evident from the research findings that the profile of the early school leaver involves a complex set of relationships which touch the community, home, school and personal lives of students in the NWT.

Factors contributing to early school leaving in the NWT are grouped under four headings: School Factors, Home Factors, Community Factors, and Factors in the Personal Lives of Students. Each is discussed separately following the summary diagram below.

Early School Leaving

School Factors

The Student...
- Has Low Home/School Contact
- Experiences Problems with School Work, Teachers & School Rules
- Has Likely Failed a Grade(s)
- Spends Most of School Time Working at Desk or Listening to Teachers Rather than Working Co-operatively/Interacting with Other Students
- Fades Out of School Rather than Quits
- Has Poor School Attendance

Home Factors

The Student...
- Has Poor Economic Circumstances
- Lives in an Average or Larger than Average Sized Household
- Is Required to Work at Home
- Considers Wage Employment Important/Necessary
- Doesn't Participate in Household Decisions
- Expects No Discipline at Home
- Lives in a Troubled Home
- Has Low Home/School Contact

Personal Factors

The Student...
- Uses Alcohol
- Has Been Exposed to Suicide
- Has Unrealistic Expectations for the Future
- Is Clear About the Value and Purpose of Education
- Has Strong / Influential Peer Relationships

Community Factors

The Student...
- Is Uncertain About the Quality of Community Life
- Is Uncertain About the Future in His/Her Community

Community Members...
- Are Dissatisfied with Control of Education
- Are Concerned About Lack of Community Support for Education
- Are Unclear About the Value and Purpose of Education

Note: All factors were identified by NWT students except those preceded by "Community Members".

COMMUNITY FACTORS

The Student...

- Is Uncertain About the Quality of Community Life
- Is Uncertain About the Future in His/Her Community

Community Members...

- Are Dissatisfied with Control of Education
- Are Concerned About Lack of Community Support for Education
- Are Unclear About the Value and Purpose of Education

Aboriginal people make up a majority of the NWT population. Incomes among aboriginal people by national standards, are below the poverty line. Over half (55%) of NWT residents live in remote communities of fewer than 2000 people and within these communities, there is often uniformity of socio-cultural and economic circumstances. These circumstances may however differ from broader Canadian society. While many NWT residents may not perceive themselves as poor or culturally distinct, economic conditions and cultural values underlie much of the discussion about early school leaving. These circumstances are reflected in community attitudes about, participation in, and support for education. This section focuses on these topics.

Opinions About NWT Communities

"There are three lifestyles in the community - the old, transition and new. There is very little in the community that binds the three together."
(a view expressed in some public meetings)

About half (51%) of the students want to be living in a different community in 10 years because they "dislike" their present community and/or have a desire to live in a more interesting place. On the other hand, almost half of the students (49%) are strongly attached to their communities (Figure 3). This is expressed through the belief that they will still be living in the same community in 10 years. To these students, the community represents both the home and the family. Students who have already

left school and those of aboriginal ancestry are more likely to see themselves living in the same community in 10 years than non-aboriginal students and those students still in school.

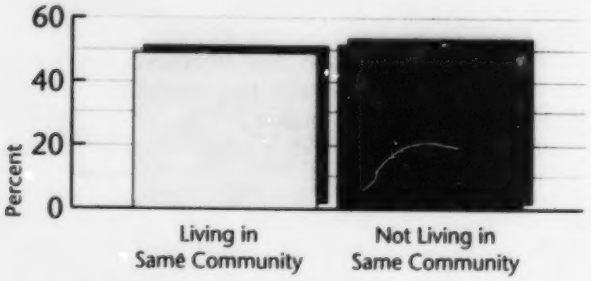


Fig. 3: Where Students Wish To Be Living in 10 Years (by Percentage)

Participation in community organizations may be another indicator of how students view their communities. While male students of all ages are more likely than females to participate in community organizations, over one-third (37%) of all students don't participate in any community groups or organizations.

Given the opportunity to make changes in their community, most students (41%) do not know what they could do or feel that there is "nothing they could do". Among those students who would seek to make changes in their community, the focus of their efforts would be:

- to increase community participation and co-ordination (23%) (eg. would get involved, go to meetings, and encourage people to respect each other),
- to reduce the use of alcohol (17%), or
- to create more jobs/businesses (14%).

The views of half of the students are shared by the general public and local education authorities. People in every community participating in the research project expressed concern for the socio-economic well-being of their community. Community members identify abusive relationships, use of illicit or prescription drugs or alcohol, and/or gambling as common problems. These problems are seen as ways in which some NWT residents are reacting to:

- the lack of jobs, inability to access jobs, or difficulties making a living,
- cultural and/or lifestyle conflicts, and
- a lack of vision and/or hope for the future.

The need to strengthen the socio-economic fabric of communities is a refrain echoed throughout the NWT. The public and to some extent the students, see creating positive role models, stimulating local involvement and control, creating jobs, confronting peer and family pressures, and coming to terms with cultural and lifestyle conflicts as ways of evolving stronger, healthier communities.

If the socio-cultural circumstances in NWT communities are viewed as distinct from Canadian society as a whole, the community environment may influence early school leaving. Canadian at-risk research (Price Waterhouse, 1990) indicates that students from socially or culturally distinct groups may not be able to identify successful role models. For example, in Newfoundland where social assistance is common and education may be seen as unnecessary to financial stability, many youth living at home in that province have few positive educational role models. The same study suggests that students in Newfoundland often get no encouragement to continue their education and in some cases, parents encourage the students to leave school early to seek employment.

Students at risk of leaving school early and those who have already left school are undecided about the quality of community life and about their own future in their communities. This view is shared by other community residents.

Community Attitudes About and Expectations of Education

"It is up to this generation to enable kids to function in both cultural worlds and to prepare kids for two futures or as many options as possible. Parents and schools have to be made aware and make kids aware, that options are necessary."
(an opinion stated in many public forums)

Most students (90%) believe that finishing high school is important (Figure 4). Students see the value of education as improving opportunities to get a good job, having more choices, having a better life, or because "education (in itself) is important". These are the same reasons that most students (84%) believe that adults value education (Figure 4). Regardless of residency in large or small communities, gender, or cultural background, students say that adults in their household believe that:

- education is more important than working at home (80%), and
- it is important to finish high school (84%).

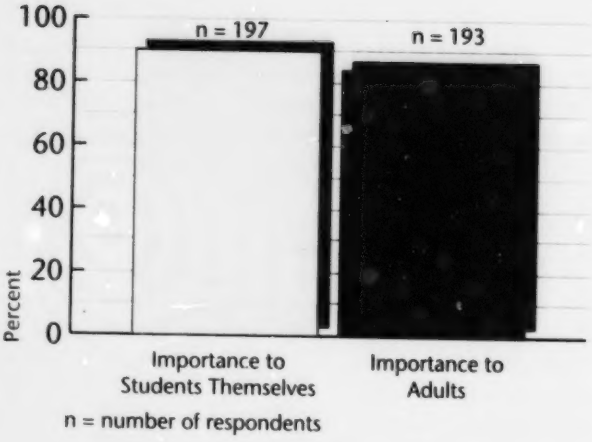


Fig. 4: Students' Perceptions About the Importance of Finishing High School (by Percentage)

The value that NWT students place on education is corroborated in early school leaving research in Ontario (Sullivan, 1988) (King et al., 1990).

Over the past 30 years the NWT has been evolving from a rural or land-based society to an urbanized society dependent on wage employment. Community residents are aware of the socio-economic shift taking place and are recognizing that skills and formal education are needed to access opportunities in the wage economy. Yet how the education system is recognizing these changes, and equipping young people to fit into contemporary society is unclear to them.

"Among students the awareness of education is low as a result of poor counselling and poor role models in the community. Kids don't have the motivation to stay in school when they can't see the value of education and they see people with low education having high visibility in the community."
(from a public forum)

In larger NWT centres, community members ask what education is for - does it enhance culture and lifestyle? does it lead to employment? does it make life better for the individual, the community or the society? They see schools providing child care but not transferring skills of rural economies (i.e. resource harvesting skills) or equipping students with the skills necessary to fully participate in the wage economy. In larger centres, the opportunity exists for more active discussion about the value and purpose of education.

Residents in smaller communities indicate a growing awareness about the value and potential of education to strengthen communities. Still there is scepticism about education among residents of these communities. Like larger NWT centres, people in small communities question what education will ultimately achieve for the children. Will it give them access to jobs when there aren't any available or any that require high school graduation? Will education cause more young people to leave the community? Will education drive other wedges between the values of aboriginal and non-aboriginal cultures? Demonstrating the contribution that education can make to improving the quality of life in small communities could reduce this scepticism.

"The local economy just can't support the demand for jobs. As a result, kids can't see anything at the end of their education."
(a view commonly expressed by the general public)

Members of the general public and local education authorities question the relevance of the school curriculum and how well the values and culture of the community are reflected in the instructional program. In smaller, predominantly aboriginal communities, the education system is often perceived as being in conflict with the cultural framework or the language, customs and cultural traditions of the home and community. For example, education is seen by some aboriginal residents as:

- changing historic leadership and decision making practices,
- threatening to home and family relationships,
- widening a socio-cultural gap between the young and the old, and
- an element eroding aboriginal languages.

For these reasons, education is posing a dilemma for some aboriginal parents. They debate whether they should send their children to school to get a "whiteman's education" or keep them at home to learn their own language and culture. This dilemma is heightened by a strong desire to improve the quality of life of young people, a need to maintain the cultural integrity of aboriginal societies, and uncertainty about the demands and expectations of a changing environment. Other community adults acknowledging these conflicts, believe that poorly articulated or shared expectations in the home, and among community/cultural groups and/or institutions, is adding to this turmoil.

When the school fails to take into account the social, economic and cultural context in which the students live, the ability of many children to remain motivated and perform well in class is jeopardized (Wehlage et al., 1989). Recognizing this, the GNWT Department of Education's *Our Students, Our Future: An Educational Framework* (1991)

seeks to deal with the cultural and lifestyle concerns of NWT residents and endorses culture-based schooling and community involvement in education. However in virtually all community forums held during this research project, few participants recognize the potential to combine academic and cultural/lifestyle programming to create more community appropriate instructional programs.

Community-wide and school-driven initiatives to reinforce the value and purpose of education in the NWT are few or are undermined by other socio-economic conditions. For example, some NWT community governments and local development corporations are requiring job applicants to have Grade 12 but too few jobs are available to encourage local youth. Almost two-thirds (64%) of the students participating in this research project who have left school early work full or part-time. This statistic would seem to confirm the opinions of many community members that the value and purpose of education is undermined by the fact that early school leavers rather than Grade 12 graduates often get the few available or the higher paying jobs. The value of a high school education has also been diminished for those young people in the past, and in many cases today, who have had to leave their community to attain higher education and then are unable to secure a job upon returning. Combined, these conditions can become a rationale for condoning early school leaving unless efforts are made to create a better understanding and appreciation of education and the need for it.

Community residents, particularly in smaller communities, say that the lack of role models, and poor or non-existent career counselling often mean that no effort is being made to alter attitudes about and expectations of education. With high rates of illiteracy, low levels of formal education, and limited educational experience among many NWT adults - 45% of the NWT working age population is functionally illiterate or has achieved Grade 9 or less - the ability to anticipate the demands that will be made on young people is also lacking. As such, many parents feel that they are unable to participate in the formal education of their children. The importance of parental involvement in education has been the subject of much of the research into early school leaving (Wehlage et al., 1989) (King, 1986) (Henderson, 1987). These studies have found that parental involvement is fundamental to the successful education of young people.

NWT students at risk of leaving school early and those who have left school place a high value on and have definite opinions about the importance of education. To them, the value of education is in the potential to get a good job, have more choices, have a better life, or because "education (in itself) is important". These students also believe that adults value education for the same reasons. Yet community residents seem to be unclear about the value and purpose of education.

Roles and Responsibilities for Education

Through the establishment of NWT community and regional education authorities, the Department of Education has sought to increase resident involvement in and responsibility for education. It is apparent from comments made by the public, school staff and local education authorities that to some extent this objective has been achieved.

The understanding of the roles and responsibilities of local education authorities seems to vary among and within communities. In general, most local authorities see their role as trouble-shooting, problem solving, and one of handling logistical and administrative details rather than providing input into the policies, practices and instructional program/curriculum within the school. Discipline, attendance and parental/community liaison are three responsibilities most commonly held by local education authorities. From a community perspective, the use of local education authorities often seems to be limited to a sounding board for resident concerns.

The main purpose of local education authorities is to increase local participation in and control over education in the community. Whether concerning the value and purpose of education, classroom practices, decision making, or curriculum content, community members generally seem to be ill-informed about the education system. Local education authorities see a lack of member skills, and limited understanding about philosophies of and methods and approaches to education as major impediments to their effectiveness. For local education authority members of aboriginal ancestry, the strangeness and relative newness of formal education is often seen as another barrier. Ensuring operating guidelines and providing orientation or training programs for local education authorities would improve the focus and effectiveness of them.

Public participation in the work of local education authorities is poor regardless of the size, socio-economic and cultural characteristics, or history of education in the community. Few community members attend meetings

or are thought to be aware of the roles and responsibilities of boards and divisional boards of education or local authorities. Education authorities and school staff have undertaken a host of initiatives designed to involve parents and the community in the school but often with limited success. Parents everywhere seem to find it difficult to become involved in the formal education of their children whether as a result of a lengthy history of non-involvement in formal education, past approaches to education, feelings of inadequacy, or lack of time. Community members see some people as using schools as day care centres or babysitting services, and handing over the responsibility for their child's education to the school. The lack of parental involvement in the school provoked the comment in one community.... *"kids have to go to school but perhaps the school can also come into the home and the community. Maybe it is time to bring education to the people."* Other research (Henderson, 1987) suggests that parents trained to work with their children positively impacts student performance at school.

In some communities the municipal government participates through an elected member, in the work of local education authorities (i.e. the Hamlet Council retains a seat on the authority). Co-ordination of education authority activities with those of municipal governments also takes place in some communities through monthly meetings or the co-sponsorship of events. In one community, public bodies together with local businesses have formed a committee to prioritize economic and human resource development needs, and this committee interfaces directly with the local education authority and school staff. In those communities where the elected leadership or local government are involved in education, there is a tendency for the general public to also become involved. The involvement of the community leadership in education and with local education authorities gives credibility and/or visibility to these organizations and to education issues, and increases opportunities for positive changes to occur.

"The NWT school system recognizes the deep and lasting influence schools have on the child and therefore plays a major role in helping students, parents and the community nurture the individual's growth. Together they will promote the skills, abilities and attitudes each student needs to be a responsible and confident member of this rapidly changing, multi-cultural society."
(from Education in the NWT,
Department of Education, 1989)

The perceived strength and appropriateness of education laws as defined in the *Education Act* are fundamental to a discussion about the roles and responsibilities for education. Community members frequently suggest that enforcement of school attendance, and responsibilities for defining the nature of and measuring the quality of education are poorly defined in the Act. In conducting this research, it was found that direction related to student records was not defined in the Act. This is a subject that is often included in education regulations.[1]

The roles and responsibilities of school staff were discussed in many communities. Most local education authorities say that communities expect school staff to be "miracle workers", to be educators, parents, community facilitators, social workers, and/or counsellors. Some schools cope with these expectations by putting strong staff support systems in place and/or adopting a team approach to education involving counselling and teaching staff, and education authority and community members. Where team approaches and/or staff support systems have not been developed, teachers are frequently perceived as:

- controlling education,
- alienated from the community, and/or
- experiencing high levels of stress and burn-out.

The average annual turn-over rate among NWT teachers is 23%. Teacher turn-over in small communities is a concern because it is seen to create instability within the school, disrupt trust relationships in the community, and damage relationships with students. Lack of regular and consistent teacher orientation at the board or divisional board or local authority level are frequently identified as contributing to teacher turn-over. To reduce teacher turn-over and improve the quality of education services, communities suggest:

- more teacher interaction with the community,
- encouraging teachers to attend local education authority meetings, and
- giving high priority to orienting new teachers to familiarize them with the community and their students.

Some schools accord higher priority to the professional development of school staff than do others. Team work, sharing information, and training/upgrading in new concepts and educational methods are most commonly cited as examples of professional development. In those schools where staff development may be a lower priority, concern is expressed by staff and local education authorities about the ability of schools to implement the instructional program. Among teachers, many suggest that five annual professional development days are inadequate to stay abreast of rapidly changing and complex societal issues, and new approaches and methods of education. At the

1. The NWT *Education Act* is currently being revised.

same time, local education authorities express frustration that they lack the power to require staff to upgrade. Certainly, professional development is cited in much of the research on early school leaving as critical to enabling teachers to respond to the changing needs of learners (Mackay et al., 1989) (King et al., 1988).

Most community members express: dissatisfaction with the extent of local input into and control of the education system, or confusion and/or uncertainty about the various roles and responsibilities of the partners in the education process.
(Students were not asked for this information.)

Community Support for and Participation in Education

Community involvement in and support for education can be demonstrated through the activities and services that community groups offer which link with school programs and the student population (eg. community work experience, tutoring, and counselling programs). For the most part, NWT community efforts to support education seem to weakly link the school and community through a single activity or event rather than through ongoing programs, joint planning, or a common philosophy or direction.

"The school together with the home and the community is not preparing students for further education or to live as responsible adults."
(a frequently expressed view of community members throughout the NWT)

School initiatives (eg. teas, concerts, speeches, awards, career days, meetings, home visits, team intervention) are pursued to increase community involvement in the school. Still most frequently, local education authority members say that NWT residents view schools as institutions that are separate from the community and that most residents don't get involved in the school. Community/home participation in the school is generally seen as initiated by the school or local education authority and usually as a result of a "crisis" with a student or within the institution. The level of community support for and participation in the NWT education system is not unusual. Other research also suggests that most interaction with the school is initiated by the institution (King et al., 1988) (Henderson, 1987) (Mackay et al., 1989).

"There is a large gap between the school and the community and the home. There is a need to take a good look at what the community expects and what the school can do. The two have to be brought together."
(from a public forum)

Developing community support for and participation in local schools has been a cornerstone of educational directions in the NWT for almost two decades. While people in all communities participating in the research project would agree with this direction, most are looking for better ways to achieve this.

Community members seem to agree that there is insufficient support for and participation in education.

HOME FACTORS

The Student...

- Has Poor Economic Circumstances
- Lives in an Average or Larger than Average Sized Household
- Is Required to Work at Home
- Considers Wage Employment Important/Necessary
- Doesn't Participate in Household Decisions
- Expects No Discipline at Home
- Lives in a Troubled Home
- Has Low Home/School Contact

Factors in the homes of NWT early school leavers and students at risk of leaving school early are discussed in this section under a number of sub-headings: attitudes in the home about education, people in the home, economic circumstances, students' household responsibilities and employment, decision making and rules in the home, family problems, and boarding homes and student residences.

Attitudes in the Home About Education

Regardless of the age, gender or cultural background of students, and the level of education or occupation of parents/guardians, students say that adults in their households:

- are helpful toward their education (80%) because they get students up in the morning and make sure that homework is done,
- are interested in their childrens' education (83%) because adults make sure students go to school everyday, inquire about school, and ask about progress and performance at school,
- believe that it is important to finish high school (84%), and
- believe that going to school is more important than working at home (80%), because they want their children to get a good job, have more choices, and have a better life.

These views are illustrated in Figure 5.

Student perceptions that parents/guardians have positive attitudes about education are to some extent confirmed in related research in the NWT (Dene Cultural Institute, 1991). A study among aboriginal school leavers in Ontario (Mackay et al., 1989) also found that aboriginal students, parents and educators agree that parents support and encourage their children's schooling. The same study reported than non-aboriginal educators disagree. A more broadly-based study among high school students in Ontario (Sullivan, 1988) also found that the majority of school leavers and students still in school believe that their parents are interested in their education.

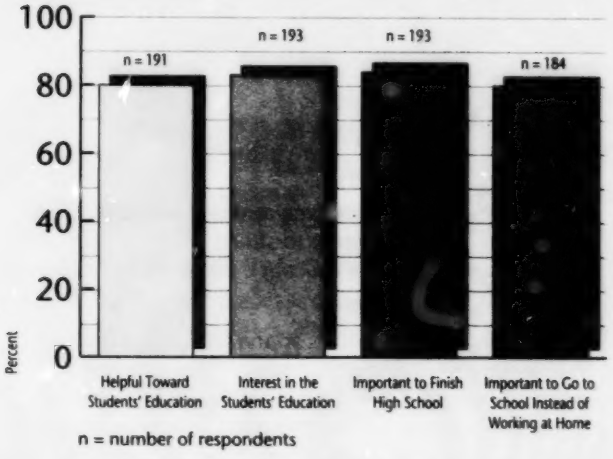


Fig. 5: Students' Perceptions About Adult Attitudes Toward Education (by Percentage)

Students participating in this research project expressed some uncertainty about the level of formal education that has been achieved by their parents or other adults living in their households. As such, data regarding educational levels of adults in the students' household should be used with caution. Compared to non-aboriginal households, aboriginal students more frequently say that adults in their household have less than Grade 9 education. While 38% of aboriginal students say their father and 27% say their mother, have Grade 5 or less education, all non-aboriginal students believe that adults in their household have Grade 6 or more. In a study of the Los Angeles Unified School District, it was suggested that the more formal education the parents have, the more likely they are to serve as positive educational role models and to have educational aspirations for their children (Tidwell, 1988). Because NWT data on parent/guardian formal education are weak, it is not possible to confirm or refute the applicability of this research to the NWT.

While students describe their parents as supportive of their formal education, at least half of the residents participating in local education authority and general public forums disagree. These residents say that factors in the home which support the schooling of young people are absent - namely structure, discipline, expectations, challenges, and responsibility. They elaborate suggesting that it is the children of younger, better educated and employed (in the wage economy) adults who are succeeding in school because these parents understand the education system, the value and importance of education, and actively promote and support the education of their children. At the same time, well-educated, working parents, particularly in the larger urban centres, are often seen as too preoccupied with their own lives to promote and support the education of their children.

"As a young person, I stayed in school because my parents expected me to and built in me expectations of 'being something' and doing something for my family and community."
(from a public forum)

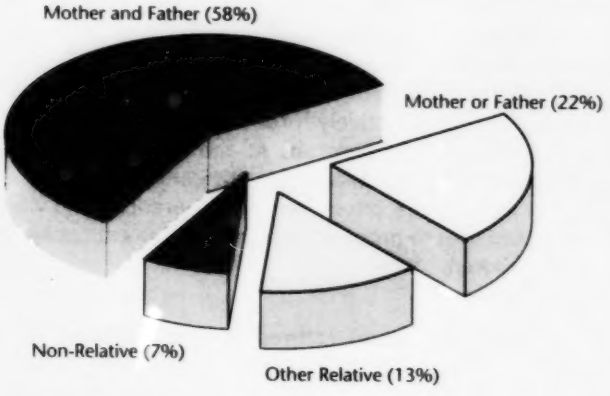
While community members frequently criticize and challenge parenting skills and priorities, local residents recognize that parents are often unable to provide the care, support and direction that their children need to succeed in school. A compendium of research (Henderson, 1987) found that the benefits of parental involvement in education are realized at all stages of the child's schooling and in the quality of education services available to children. The research also found that parents with little formal education, if trained, can be as effective in supporting the education of their children as more educated parents. Improving parenting skills and particularly the responsibilities parents have toward their childrens' schooling, are initiatives which might bring NWT student perceptions and community opinions closer together.

Students at risk and those who have left school early believe that their parents/guardians have a positive attitude about their education. At least half of the community residents participating in the research, disagree.

People in the Home

More than half of the students (58%) participating in this research project live with their mother and father (Figure 6). Inuit/Inuvialuit students (67%) more frequently live with their mother and father than either Dene/Metis (51%) or non-aboriginal (53%) students. Among students who don't live with their mother and father, a greater proportion live with their mother and/or siblings than with their father and/or siblings. The research also shows

that Dene/Metis are more likely to live with other relatives (eg. grandparents, aunts, uncles) than are Inuit/Inuvialuit or non-aboriginal students.



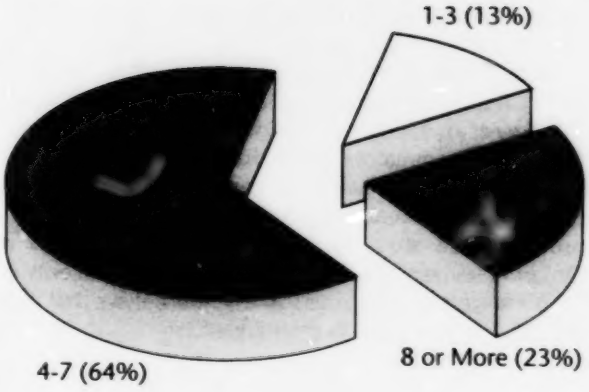
number of respondents = 198

Fig. 6: Students' Relationship to Other People in the Home (by Percentage of Students)

Contrary to information provided by students, many local education authority and other community members have the view that most students at risk of leaving school early and those who have dropped out of the system, are raised by their grandparents or by only one parent.

To some extent, the NWT research conflicts with findings from other at-risk studies. For example, a Canadian study of early school leavers (Price Waterhouse, 1990) refers to the single parent home situation as one of a series of personal and family situations or critical events which together appear to culminate in early school leaving. Another study (Shaw, 1982) acknowledges that children from homes where only a single parent is present are least likely to remain in the formal school setting until graduation, possibly because of financial difficulties rather than the structure of the home environment. The family unit was also considered in an examination of dropouts from American Indian education between 1980-1987 (Eberhard, 1989). In this study, it was found that the marital status of parents and the relationship of adults in the household to the student had little or no affect on the student's decision to leave school.

According to Statistics Canada (1986 Census), the average number of persons in NWT households was 3.7. Most students (87%) participating in this research say they have 4 or more people living in their household and of these students, 23% have 8 or more people living in their homes (Figure 7). Average or larger than average-sized households may account for some community perceptions that overcrowding in the home is as a factor contributing to early school leaving.



number of respondents = 197

Fig. 7: Number of People Living in the Students' Household (by Percentage of Students)

"Overcrowding in the home makes it very difficult for children to study."
(a view of some local education authority members)

While the term "quiet space" is subjective and interpretations may vary, 84% of students say that a quiet space is available in their home to study and do homework. Non-aboriginal and Inuit/Inuvialuit students are more likely than Dene/Metis students to identify the availability of quiet space in their home (Figure 8).

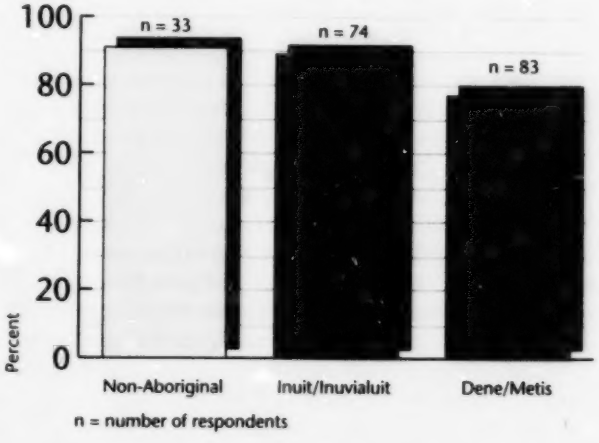


Fig. 8: Students' Opinion About the Availability of a Quiet Area in Their Household (Percentage by Cultural Background)

Most students (78%) say that they live in the same household today as the one where they grew up. Of all age and gender groups, female students over 14 years of age are more likely to live in different homes now. Of

those students living in a different household now (22%), most have lived in a number of different households since they were 10 years of age (Figure 9). Parent separation/ divorce, abuse in the home, and poor relationships with parents are most often given as reasons for the student living in a different household now. Other at-risk research (Eberhard, 1989) showed that early school leavers moved twice as much as those who stayed in school.

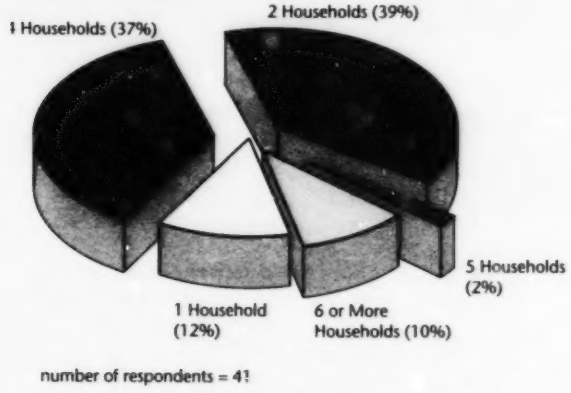


Fig. 9: Number of Households Students Have Lived in Since They Were 10 Years Old (by Percentage of Students Who Have Lived in Different Households)

Students living in different households now were asked to compare the characteristics of their current household with the one where they grew up. Many of these students could not remember the kind of work done by adults in the household where they grew up, or whether that household received social assistance. While specific details were difficult to recall, students feel that their current household is safer, less violent, and/or has less drinking than the one where they grew up. Among students who live in a different household today, there is a tendency for these students to be living in a different community now.

At risk students and those who have left school tend to be members of traditional mother and father families, live in average or larger than average-sized households, and live in the same household now as the one where they grew up.

Economic Circumstances

The students participating in this research project describe the economic circumstances in their homes in the following ways.

- Wage employment is pursued by the parents of about two-thirds of the students. Compared to students in school, the parents of students no longer in school are more likely to be involved in resource harvesting activities, unemployed or work around the home.

- Slightly more than half (51%) of the students say that their households never receive social assistance (Figure 10). Less than half (43%) of the students in school say that their household receives social assistance compared to 64% of the households of students who have left school. Most non-aboriginal students (94%) say their households never receive social assistance. Only 42% of aboriginal students say that their households never receive social assistance.

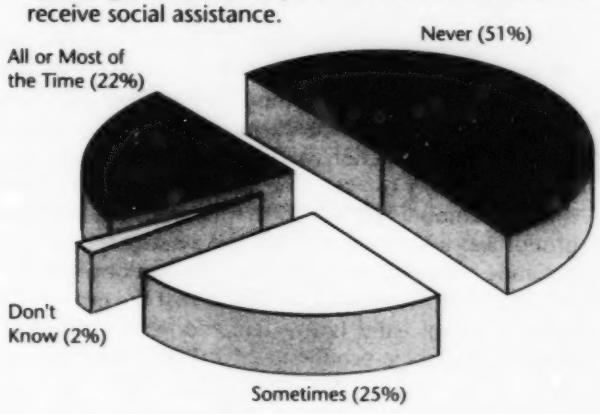


Fig. 10: Households Receiving Social Assistance (by Percentage of Students)

- Most students (66%) report that their households always or sometimes have lots of food (Figure 11). A greater number of students (51%) out of school report that their household sometimes runs out of food or never seems to have enough food. This compares to 27% of households where the student is in school. Almost two-thirds (65%) of non-aboriginal students say their households always have lots of food compared to 48% of Dene/Metis and 22% of Inuit/Inuvialuit students.

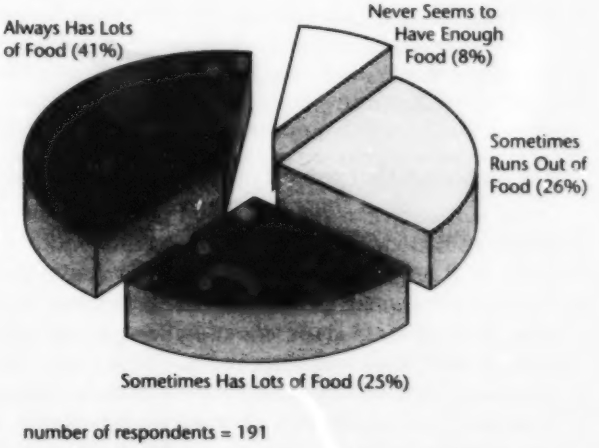

Always Has Lots of Food (41%)
Never Seems to Have Enough Food (8%)
Sometimes Runs Out of Food (26%)
Sometimes Has Lots of Food (25%)
number of respondents = 191

Fig. 11: Availability of Food in the Students' Household (by Percentage of Students)

About one-quarter of the Cumulative Files make reference to the poor mental and/or physical health of the student. The collection instrument did not gather data about students being tired/sleepy, distracted, lethargic, or disruptive as a result of poor nourishment. School staff and local education authority members in both large and small communities say that some children come to school tired and hungry.

The findings of the *Canadian Health Attitudes and Behaviours Survey* (King et al., 1984) and discussions with local education authorities and school staff suggest that some young people in the NWT may not receive proper nourishment to function well in school. That survey found that the number of young people in the NWT receiving the daily amount and variety of food from the four food groups was well below the national average for students in Grades 4 and 7 and slightly below among those in Grade 10. Other research has found that the potential of leaving school early is greater among students from families of low socio-economic status (Kolstad and Owings, 1986) (Rumberger, 1987) (King et al., 1986) (Sullivan, 1988). That is, early school leavers are more likely to have fathers who are unemployed or employed in labour intensive jobs, and to live in homes with lower than average household incomes.

Community members agree that economic circumstances in the home are a factor in early school leaving. However there is no agreement on the kind of economic family which is most susceptible in the NWT.

- In some communities, students at risk of leaving school early are thought to be members of "bush" or "land" families because expectations and lifestyles are distinctly different in these homes than in those of community-based families and in the school itself.
- In some large urban centres, children from homes where both parents work are thought to be at risk of leaving school early because of the lack of time and support rendered to children.

"The problem is that parents are preoccupied. All they do is chase the money."
(a sentiment expressed in many NWT communities)

- In other communities, children from homes seen to be in transition from land to community living are thought to be at risk of leaving school early. These homes are seen as having difficulty providing the economic security necessary to support their children's education. It is these families who are often seen as pressuring young adults to leave or miss school in order to contribute economically to the family unit. It is also these families who are perceived to have lower expectations of young people and to provide less leadership.

Students no longer in school and aboriginal students come from homes with poor economic circumstances as evidenced by a greater use of social assistance and more incidences of food being unavailable in the households of these students. Community members believe that economic circumstances in the home are a factor in early school leaving in the NWT.

Students' Household Responsibilities and Their Employment

"Babysitting and household responsibilities are causing many students to drop out of school."
(a perception frequently expressed by the general public)

Most students (86%) have household responsibilities and about one-fifth fulfill these responsibilities during school hours. Among students who are in school, yard work and hunting/trapping/fishing are most frequently done during school hours. Students who are no longer in school most often babysit, do dishes and clean house during school hours. Compared to all other students, females 14 years of age and older more often work at home (eg. babysitting, looking after elders, and cleaning) during school hours.

"There are a higher number of boys dropping out of school for short-term employment to help (their) families pay bills. They come back to school and can't catch up."
(statement from a public forum)

Only 56% of students out of school compared to 86% of students in school prefer going to school to working at home. School is preferred to work at home because students "like being with friends" or "want to get an education". Of those students who are no longer in school, one-quarter say that working at home was the main reason for leaving school.

"Students' responsibilities at home may interfere with their attendance at school."
(a view of some local education authority members)

Since starting school in the past year, about one-third (32%) of the students worked part-time. Students with jobs say they work an average of 11 hours during the week

and 11 hours on weekends. In the past year more than one-third (36%) of students no longer in school worked full time and 28% worked part-time (Figure 12). Most of these students (85%) like(d) their job because they are/were earning money. The main reasons students dislike(d) their jobs are very similar to those given for disliking school: "work is boring" or "don't like getting up in the morning". Slightly less than one-quarter (22%) of the students say that the reason they quit school was to get a job. Most of the students who left school early to get a job were at least 16 years of age.

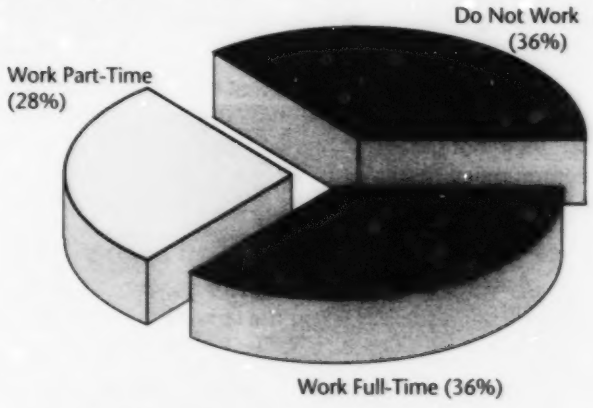


Fig. 12: Current Work Activities Among Students No Longer in School (by Percentage)

Other Canadian research corroborates the views of NWT students. Work related reasons were identified by about one in four early school leavers (Statistics Canada, 1991) as reasons for leaving school. On the other hand, research in Ontario (King et al., 1988) (Sullivan, 1988) found that employment opportunities don't encourage students to leave school as one-third don't have jobs to go to, one-third continue to work part-time, and one-third take up new employment at low-paying jobs which offer no opportunities for advancement.

Work responsibilities at home or wage employment were reasons that almost half (47%) of early school leavers quit school. Over one-third of those students who left school early had full-time jobs.

Decision Making and Rules in the Home

It is the opinion of most students (72%) that decisions and rules in the home are usually made by one or both parents (Figure 13). Student participation in or individual responsibility for decision making and setting rules in the home is higher among students who are no longer in school than among those in school.

"For kids today, day is night and night is day. Kids won't listen when they are told to sleep or go to school."
(a view frequently expressed in small NWT communities)

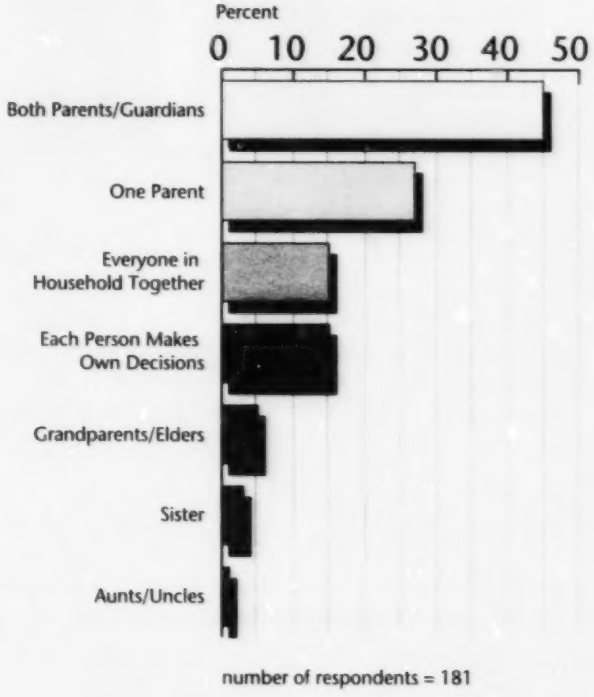


Fig. 13: Responsibility for Setting Rules and Making Decisions in the Household (by Percentage of Students)

Half of the students interviewed say that decisions were made in the home in the past year as to whether to attend school, go back to school or leave school. Two-thirds of the students who are no longer in school say that decisions of this nature were made in the last year compared to less than half (44%) of the students in school. Similarly, 59% of non-aboriginal students compared to 48% of aboriginal students say that decisions of this nature were made in the past year (Figure 14). These data would seem to contradict opinions offered by community members that adults in the home are not actively concerned about their children's education. Certainly from comments put forth by local education authority and other community members, there is a sense that few decisions are being made and/or few rules are being set down in the home about education.

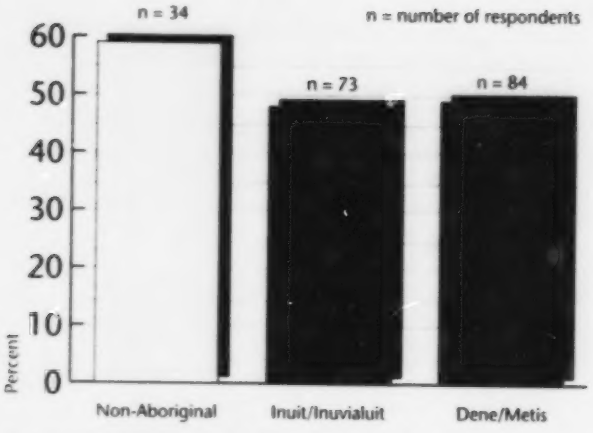


Fig. 14: Decisions Made in the Household in the Past Year About School (Percentage of Students by Cultural Background)

If students break household rules, almost half (46%) can expect to receive no punishment or penalty (Figure 15). Students who are out of school are more likely to expect no punishment or penalty when they break rules in the home than students who are in school.

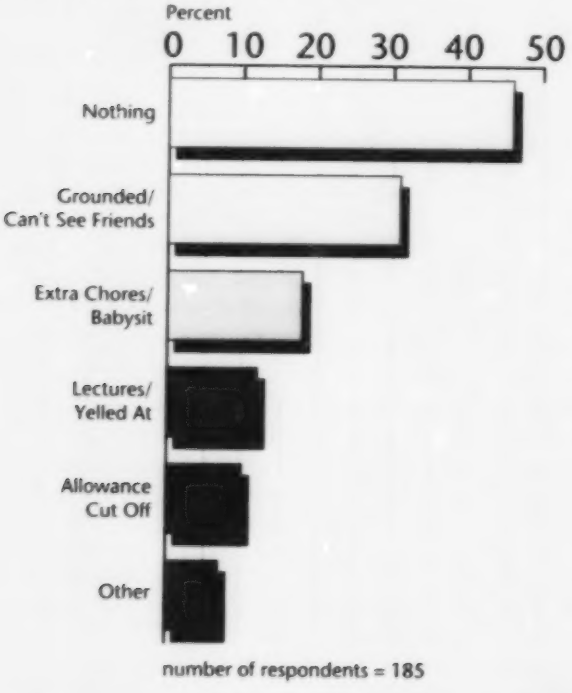


Fig. 15: Punishment or Penalty Expected If the Student Breaks the Household Rules (by Percentage of Students)

In addition:

- the punishment or penalty rendered when rules are broken does not vary with the type of household (i.e. father and mother households react the same as households headed by a single parent, grandparent or other adult).
- non-aboriginal households are more likely to lecture or yell at students or to "ground" them for breaking rules than are aboriginal households.
- aboriginal households are more likely to do "nothing" about household rules being broken than are non-aboriginal households.

Community members suggest that many parents are too preoccupied or apathetic to develop rules and expectations for their household. Whether in small or large NWT communities, few parents are seen to make demands on or to discipline their children. Many reasons are offered for these perceptions.

- Parents assume that routines in the community are the same as they are/were on the land.

"Confusion about lifestyles and cultural expectations are resulting in unclear rules..."
(an opinion often expressed in public forums)

- Parents themselves don't understand that the parenting role has changed - they don't understand the guidance and structure young people need to cope in contemporary society.
- Many of today's parents were raised in hostels, in isolation of the family unit - they don't know how to take responsibility for the family and have weak parenting skills.
- Parents have too many problems of their own to attend to the needs of young people.
- Parents are afraid to discipline their children because they fear reprisal from their children, from the law, or from social workers in the community.
- Parents "love their children" too much, spoil and appease their children - parents do not want their children to experience the hardships that they themselves may have suffered.

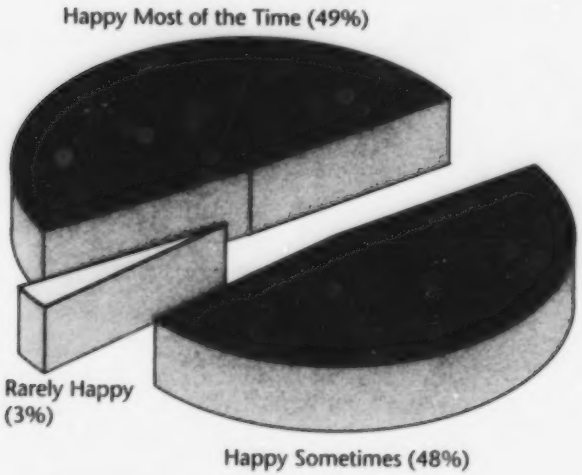
Students who have left school and those at risk of doing so do not participate in decision making and rule setting in the home and generally don't expect any punishment or disciplinary actions if they break household rules.

Family Problems

"The home environment has so much to do with what goes on at school."
(statement from a public forum)

Students describe their home environment in the following ways:

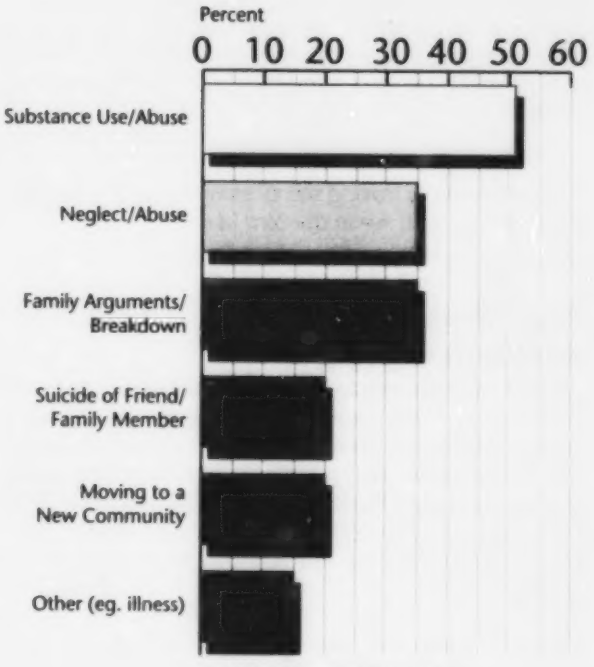
- Almost all (97%) of the students report living in homes that are happy most or some of the time (Figure 16).



number of respondents = 194

Fig. 16: Students' Impressions of the Kind of Home They Live In (by Percentage)

- Over half (51%) of the students say their schooling has been negatively affected by their own or another household member's use of alcohol, drugs or solvents (Figure 17).
- Over one-third (35%) of the students say their schooling has been negatively affected by neglect and/or abuse in the home (Figure 17).
- Over one-third (35%) of students say their schooling has been negatively affected by family arguments/ breakdown (Figure 17).
- Students see problems in the home causing them to get inadequate sleep, miss or skip school, and/or constantly think about or be preoccupied with problems in the home.
- Most male students say problems in the home cause them to get insufficient sleep or to have to look after themselves. Younger female students most frequently say that problems in the home cause them to dislike school and have problems with school work while older female students feel worried/distracted/upset as



number of respondents = 156

Fig. 17: Factors in the Home Seen by Students to Have a Negative Affect on Their Schooling (by Percentage)

While most students can offer no suggestions for changing or would alter nothing about their home life, those who did, would like to have better relationships with their parents or a bigger/cleaner house.

In virtually every meeting with the general public and local education authorities, family problems were identified as negatively affecting young people and their schooling. Substance abuse, gambling, and fragmented relationships in the home are seen to contribute to:

- child neglect (i.e. failure to feed children properly and get them up for school in the morning),
- a lack of interest in their child's education, and
- a lack of discipline and structure in the home.

Young people experiencing family problems are seen by community members to seek out other homes to live in. Quite often, students seem to move in with their grandparents but elders recognize that it is increasingly more difficult for them to provide the guidance young people require in today's society. Elders are becoming more reluctant to take responsibility for raising their grandchildren. In the words of one elder, *"if parents won't take responsibility, the kids should be sent off to boarding school."*

Virtually all of the North American research into early school leaving refers to the impact of the family/household environment. Generally it has been found that students with the most positive relationships with their parents and other household members tend to see themselves as experiencing the least difficulties in school (King et al., 1986).

Students at risk of leaving school early and those who have left school seem to live in troubled homes.

Boarding Homes and Student Residences

Of the 140 students participating in the research who are in school, only 16% live in a student residence or boarding home. Of this small number of students, slightly less than half responded to questions about these living arrangements. It is therefore not possible to identify from the students' perspective, any factors within these environments which might contribute to early school leaving.

Among community members, particularly in small communities, there is a perception that sending students out to school to live in boarding homes and student residences will put the student at risk of leaving school. Removed from the social bonds of the family, community members say students become homesick, have more opportunities to get into trouble, and have fewer opportunities to receive support to deal with their problems. The views of community members are largely supported by research into early school leaving among aboriginal students in Ontario (Mackay et al., 1989).

SCHOOL FACTORS

The Student...

- Has Low Home/School Contact
- Experiences Problems with School Work, Teachers & School Rules
- Has Likely Failed a Grade(s)
- Spends Most of School Time Working at Desk or Listening to Teachers Rather than Working Co-operatively/Interacting with Other Students
- Fades Out of School Rather than Quits
- Has Poor School Attendance

The school environment and those factors in it related to early school leaving in the NWT are described under the following sub-headings: student attitudes about school, age and class/grade relationships, school instructional program, teaching styles and methods, academic performance, attendance, making and breaking school rules, student support, school-home-community relations, school sponsored extracurricular activities, and other school related factors.

Student Attitudes About School

Over three-quarters (76%) of the students in school say they like school but almost half (48%) of them have considered quitting. The reasons students consider leaving school are: "didn't feel like going", poor relationships with teachers, or work being too difficult. Compared to aboriginal students, non-aboriginal students are more likely to consider quitting school (Figure 18).

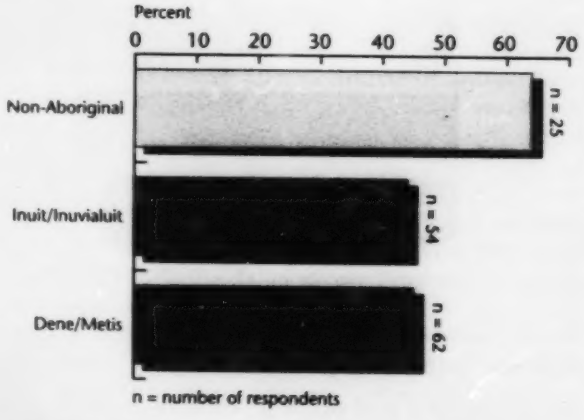


Fig. 18: Students At Risk of Leaving School Early Who Have Considered Quitting (Percentage by Cultural Background)

Students were asked to identify the reasons that they like or dislike school.

- Seeing friends, learning new things/doing interesting things, and playing sports are the main reasons students like school. These reasons are the same among students of all ages.
- Students of all ages say a main reason they dislike school is "time" requirements (eg. having to get up in the morning, long hours, too many days). School rules, relationships with teachers, and "boring" are other reasons students give for disliking school. Factors related to time are a stronger dislike among students aged 11-15 years of age than among those 16 or more years of age.

In Ontario (Sullivan, 1988), only one in six non-school leavers had thought about leaving. In this same study both early school leavers and non-leavers cite reasons for being dissatisfied with school. Over four in ten of the comments from early school leavers referred to their relationships with teachers and about one-half of the remarks by non-leavers were about the availability of courses.

There are a number of reasons NWT students who are no longer in school give for quitting (Figure 19) and the reasons given vary little from those cited by students in southern Canada. School related factors given for leaving school early include "boredom", poor grades, teachers, and discipline (Sullivan, 1988) (Statistics Canada, 1991).

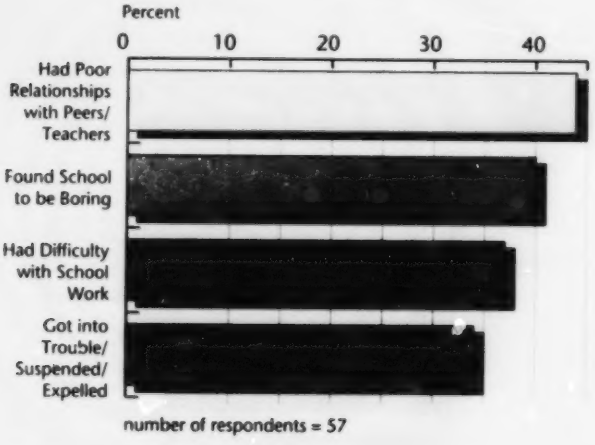


Fig. 19: The Main Reasons Students Who Are No Longer in School Give for Quitting (by Percentage)

Due to structural and wording problems in the student questionnaire, data related to changes in attitude about school are poor. Understanding this, almost half (47%) of the students in school and more than half (54%) of the students out of school say they have always liked school.

The main reasons students give for changing their attitude about school are dislike for a particular teacher/principal and getting into trouble/suspensions/detentions.

Most students have experienced problems at school in the past year or in the year before they left school (Table 5). The problems experienced are similar to those given for disliking school - school work (eg. work is too hard), teachers (eg. not getting help from teachers/poor relationships with teachers/principal), and school rules/ disciplinary actions. Problems experienced at school vary somewhat with the cultural background of the student. Aboriginal students most frequently have problems with school work while the main problem for non-aboriginal students is poor relationships with teachers. Dene/Metis and non-aboriginal students are more likely to identify rules and disciplinary actions as problems than are Inuit/ Inuvialuit. Other research (Sullivan, 1988) found that a major complaint of early school leavers is that teachers just don't care about them.

Table 5: Most Frequently Cited Problems Students Have Experienced at School in the Past Year (Percentage of Students by Cultural Background)

PROBLEMS RELATED TO	DENE/ METIS	INUIT/ INUVIALUIT	NON-ABORIGINAL	TOTAL
SCHOOL WORK	54%	61%	55%	54%
TEACHERS	43%	55%	70%	52%
SCHOOL RULES	47%	29%	55%	42%
HOME/FRIENDS	22%	23%	48%	28%
OTHER	9%	4%	3%	6%
HAD NO PROBLEMS	22%	23%	9%	20%
number of respondents	81	56	33	170

Relationships with teachers are a reason approximately one-third of the students say that they dislike school and teachers are cited as a problem experienced at school in the past year by over half of the students. Student-teacher relationships are influenced by personalities. Attributes NWT students like in teachers are: nice, funny, friendly, easy to talk to, helpful and encouraging. Conversely, teachers who are bad-tempered, mean, strict, and uncaring are disliked by students. The views of NWT students are supported in other research (King et al., 1988). From the students' perspective, good teachers understand them, treat them fairly, show they really care about them, and are willing to help them. In short, mutual respect is key to good teacher-student relationships. Like adults, young people want to be respected and recognized as individuals.

When students have a low attachment to teachers and the school administration, they may not care what these people think about them. Under these conditions it may be easy for students to become alienated and then gradually reject the school (Wehlage, 1989). Research in Northern Alberta (HLA

Consultants, 1984) found that most early school leavers do not have positive relationships with teachers, even though the interaction between students and teachers "lies at the heart of education" (King et al., 1988).

Students at risk of leaving school early like school for social and personal reasons but consider quitting because of problems related to school work, teachers and school rules. Students who have recently left school did so because of poor relationships with peers or teachers; they found school boring and/or had difficulty with school work; or they got into trouble/suspended/expelled.

The Age and Grade of Students

Virtually all of the students participating in this research started school at the age of 7 years or younger. While this could put most 16 year old students in Grade 10 or 11, in fact, only 6% of the students 16 years of age and 31% of students 17 or more years of age have achieved Grade 10 or 11 (Figure 20). Students do not identify failing a grade(s) as a significant concern to them. For example, students do not cite having failed one grade or more, or being older than others in the class as:

- a primary or secondary reason for changing their feelings about school,
- a problem experienced at school this past year,
- a reason for missing school, or
- a reason for considering quitting school.

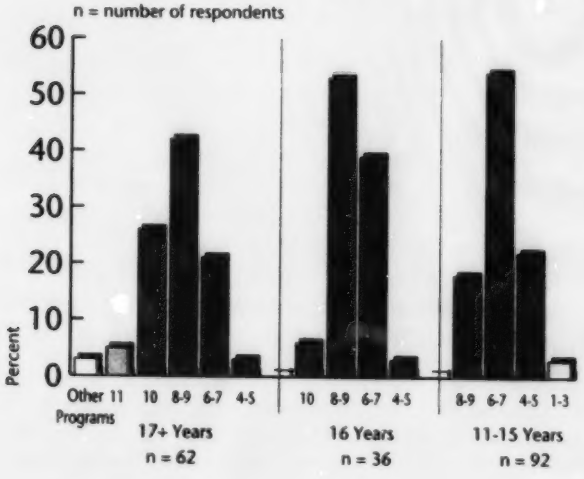


Fig. 20: Self-Reported Age and Last Grade/Class Completed (by Percentage of Students)

Note: Other includes alternative programs

Among students who are no longer in school only 8% cite failing a grade as a factor in their decision to quit school. For those students who have comments on their Cumulative Files about grade retention, less than one-third say that grade retention contributed to a change in attitude about school or affected relationships with peers. Despite an apparent lack of importance, failing a grade/class is a yardstick NWT students use to compare their performance in school with that of their peers. Among students who say their performance was/is not as good as others, about 45% identify having failed a grade/class or being older than others in the class as reasons for this view.

"The education system will have to adjust age-grade expectations. Most kids don't graduate until 19-20 years of age. By this time they have a better idea of what they want and are more likely to succeed."
(a view expressed by some local education authority members)

At least once and as many as five times on two-thirds of the Cumulative Files reference is made to the student repeating/failing/being retained in a grade. Repeated comments are more evident amongst the age group 16 years and older. A slightly larger percentage of those (67%) who are out of school had a reference to grade retention than those who are still in school. There are few comments on Cumulative Files about students being older than their peers. In discussions however, school staff observe difficulties experienced and lower levels of achievement and performance among students who are older than others in the class.

It is well documented that poor academic achievement in school, as measured by grades, test scores and grade retention is associated with dropping out. Both American and Canadian research (Ekstrom et al.,1986) (King et al., 1990) have found that students who fall behind in Grade 9 or 10 feel that their prospect of graduation has already begun to dim. The research also shows that early school leavers are likely to have failed at least one grade and often feel that they have no realistic alternative but to leave school (King et al., 1990). In a study of dropouts from American Indian education between 1980 and 1987 (Eberhard, 1989), the data indicated that students who have been retained seldom stay in school. The study suggests that no pupil is being helped when schools retain them, usually because students repeat the same work, rather than attempting a revised program designed to address individual needs and based on the student's strengths.

Almost all students interviewed started school in pre-school or kindergarten and were younger than 5 years of

age (44%) or were between 6 and 7 years of age (55%). Still there are perceptions among some school staff that many students are not ready to start school. Some students are seen as "being considerably behind when they enter the system" (i.e. in terms of responsiveness to instruction, socialization, communications, and interests). It is unclear from the research whether these opinions reflect cultural biases and/or are a comment on the school system and its expectations.

In the NWT, the Department of Education recognizes that it is important for students to be educated with their peers. However there is a tendency in some NWT schools to repeat students in younger grades until such time as the age-grade relationship is obviously unbalanced. For local education authorities and the general public, the discussion about age-grade relationships is ongoing and commonly reflects on the merits and impacts of passing and failing students (i.e. the importance of peer relationships and the achievement of certain skills and knowledge). Some community members see a "no fail system" as enabling students to excel in at least some areas thereby providing motivation and encouragement. Others feel an injustice to students by moving them through the system whether they have achieved or not. Most commonly however, the understanding of school practices and policies on grade retention and advancement is confused. The opportunity exists for schools, education authorities and boards and divisional boards of education to communicate and discuss these practices and policies with parents and students.

Early school leavers and students at risk of leaving school early are likely to have failed a grade(s).

School Instructional Program

Consistently students indicate that they are finding school work too hard or that they are getting behind in their school work. Difficulty with school work is cited by students (54%) as the main problem experienced at school in the past year and by about one-third of students as a reason for disliking school. However, students don't see specific courses as a factor contributing to early school leaving and few say that they are taking courses that seem to be irrelevant.

The school instructional program is an issue for local education authority and community members and, to teaching staff. The concerns are numerous and link in part to a belief that education in the NWT is curriculum rather than needs based. While the NWT has its own curriculum for K-Grade 9 and some Grade 10-12 courses, there is some opinion that the Alberta Curriculum used in Grades 10-12 places too much emphasis on academic programming rather than on responding to the range of needs that exist in the NWT. Community members say that they see students getting discouraged because they don't see the relevance of or can't apply the concepts they learn. It is a common view that until the content of the school's program is tied to "real life", linkages between the school and community will be even more difficult to forge. Because the NWT curriculum development process both allows for and is dependent upon input from all regions, the opportunity exists for "real life" to be reflected in much of the NWT curriculum.

"Teachers believe that a cultural framework can be used in the school and can be reflective of the learning styles of the community. Cultural and academic programs can be rolled together."
(a theme raised in some community meetings and discussions with teaching staff)

Despite northern and local adaptations, educators and other residents, especially in small communities, say that the use of the Alberta Curriculum is creating conflicts. This is particularly the case among school populations whose first language is not English and whose culture differs from broader Canadian or Albertan society. School staff also note that concerns about the instructional program diminish effective and consistent delivery.

The overall concepts and approaches used today in the education process are also a matter of some discussion in NWT communities. Whole language [1], mainstreaming [2], and thematic teaching [3] have been introduced into NWT schools in the last decade to link language, socio-cultural concepts and learning. Other approaches for the 1990s include student-centered [4], and a balancing of learning experiences [5]. While these approaches seem to be designed to break down barriers to good performance in school, it is clear from community discussions that:

1. **Whole Language:** a student-centred or oriented process which is culture based and which integrates language learning through the use of real situations and authentic materials.
2. **Mainstreaming:** This term was used in the early 1980s to describe the integration of all students, including those perceived as having "special needs", into the mainstream of the system - the regular classroom in the regular school. Today, the term "inclusive schooling" is used to describe the membership, participation and learning of all students in the regular classroom. It does not imply that all students should follow the same program.
3. **Thematic Teaching:** a broad range of teaching and learning processes which use a common theme to integrate all subject areas.
4. **Student-Centered Learning:** learning which is shaped by the needs of the learner.
5. **Balance of Learning Experiences:** a wholistic approach to education which promotes development and responds to all the needs of learners - physical, emotional, social, intellectual and spiritual.

- there is lack of acceptance or understanding of these approaches,
- there is opinion that some schools may not have the staff with the necessary skills to implement these approaches, and
- systems to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of these approaches/methods may not have been put in place or may not have been communicated and/or understood.

One of the more frequently cited examples of these concerns was revealed in discussions about "mainstreaming". Many educators and community residents feel that the approach does not work because students do not want to be treated differently in front of their peers. These remarks would indicate either a lack of understanding of mainstreaming or that mainstreaming may not be properly/fully implemented in some NWT schools.

Local education authorities also discuss the appropriateness of resources available to effectively deliver the instructional program. They complain about the lack of resources to offer a full range of program options (eg. industrial arts) or poor access to appropriate materials which will keep students interested in school. Other research (Wehlage et al., 1989) suggests that schools may contribute to student failure and risk of dropping out if they are unable to adapt to student needs and/or have the expectation that students should conform completely to the school. Schools that offer courses and programs which prepare students for work and/or for continued education have a positive effect on the attitudes of students, parents, and teachers about school (Wehlage et al., 1989) (King et al., 1988).

Many of the concerns regarding the school instructional program are addressed in the Department of Education's 1991 *Our Students, Our Future: An Educational Framework*. The document promotes schooling that incorporates and is shaped by the culture and other circumstances of individual communities. Given the high level of concern about the instructional program there needs to be greater advocacy of this framework at the community level.

Students at risk of leaving school early and those who have left school consistently find school work too hard or are getting behind. Community members seem to be uncertain about the content and the delivery of the school instructional program.

Teaching Styles and Methods

"The challenge in program delivery is to deal with a wide variation in needs and sporadic attendance."
(comments offered by some teaching staff)

Two-thirds or more of students say, that they spent most of their time at school this past year doing work by themselves at their desk, and over half spent their time listening to teachers. Less than one-quarter of the students spent their time at school learning or interacting with other students. There is little variation between the way in which students in the lower and those in higher grades spend their time at school (Figure 21).

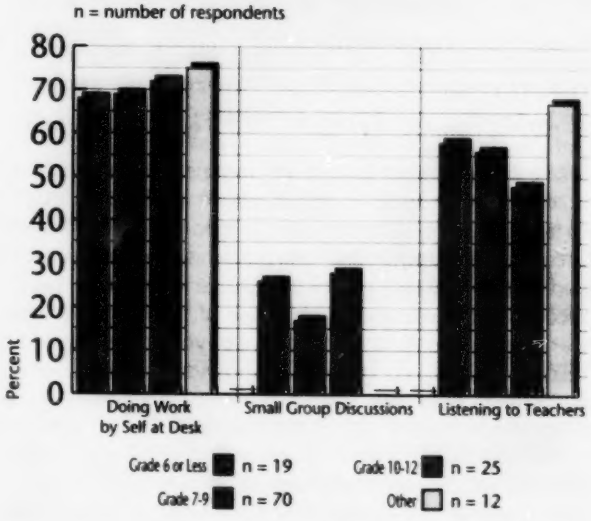


Fig. 21: How Students' Time Was Spent At School in the Past Year (Percentage of Students by Grade)

Students in Ontario schools also report that most frequently, teachers talk and they listen or work on assignments. Students rarely interact among themselves or work cooperatively on group projects and there is little evidence that teachers give students greater autonomy as they move through the grades (King et al., 1988).

Less than 30% of CUM Files reviewed contain comments on teaching styles or methods. Informal discussions with school staff provided more insight. Schools generally seem to adopt thematic teaching methods in the lower grades, turning gradually to a subject-textbook style[1] of teaching in junior and high school grades. Inappropriate materials, lack of a standardized curriculum[2] or awareness

1. **Subject-textbook teaching:** teaching and learning processes which rely on textbooks or similar support materials, and which address various subjects in isolation.
2. In the NWT, there is a standardized curriculum in place for most subjects. Individual school boards and divisional boards of education develop materials/lessons to ensure that curricula are covered and adapted to the culture and other needs of their students.

of it, and varying skill levels are seen to influence teaching styles and methods in the Northwest Territories. School staff also note that teaching methods may vary depending on the academic performance of students and the use of subject specialists.

Local education authorities and other community members see teaching styles and methods varying within their schools. They see "good" teachers and "bad" teachers very much the way their children perceive school staff. A common complaint among community members is that teaching methods and styles do not seem to reflect an understanding of the language, culture or the development of the community. Some community members see teaching methods and styles as factors of:

- teacher turn-over,
- curriculum appropriateness,
- teacher appreciation of the "client group", and/or
- parent/community input into the education system.

While there is recognition in some communities that teachers try to work in small groups and link with the community, the opposite view is held in others. Clearly, greater examination and discussion is required in NWT communities about teaching styles and methods which recognize the use and importance of traditional or local learning processes and the desire of young people to be respected and recognized as individuals, and involve students in their own learning.

Students at risk of leaving school early and early school leavers spend their time at school working by themselves at their desks or listening to teachers rather than working co-operatively in small groups.

Academic Performance

Over two-thirds (67%) of students at risk of leaving school early and 62% of those who have left in the last year describe their performance in school as average or better than others (Table 6), and most of these students have always felt this way. Research in southern Canada confirms that early school leavers are most often B or C level students (Statistics Canada, 1991) (Sullivan, 1988).

Table 6: How Students Compare Their Performance in School With Others

Performance Compared to Other Students	PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS In School	Out of School
Better Than Most	6	15
Same As Others	61	47
Not As Good As Others	33	37
	n = 138	n = 59

n = number of respondents

Among those NWT students who consider their academic performance to be worse than others, failing a grade(s)/ older than others in the class and poor relationships with teachers and other students were cited as the main criteria for making this judgement. Over half of these students have not always felt this way and one-quarter changed their opinion as a result of school work becoming too hard, getting behind in their school work and/or failing a grade. As noted previously, the data on changes in attitude about school should be used with caution. Given this proviso, over two-thirds of those students who like school now also say their performance in school is better than most or the same as other students. Over half (53%) of those students who don't like school say their performance is not as good as others. Other research corroborates these findings, suggesting that students who receive high marks tend to feel better about themselves and their schools (King et al., 1988).

Mainly through marks/grades on report cards, the Cumulative Files indicate good and poor academic performance in a core group of subjects (eg. language arts, mathematics, science, social studies). While the method of determining marks/grades varies widely among teachers in the same school and between schools, evidence of both good and poor academic performance appeared on 65% to 70% of the Cumulative Files. This suggests that students are excelling in certain core subjects during some period of their schooling while at other points they are doing poorly in those same subjects. For those Cumulative Files with evidence of both good and poor academic performance, 42% of the students themselves also say they are doing poorly in school and finding the work too hard/getting behind. It has been found that the factors that most frequently influence the evaluation of students at all levels in all subjects are achievement on tests/exams, and effort and behaviour in class (King et al., 1988).

"As part of a job placement program, a parent worked as a classroom assistant for a couple of months and as a result, the performance of her own child improved.....small successes have to be built on."
(from a public meeting)

Over 60% of the students had at least one and as many as five comments on their Cumulative Files regarding functioning below grade level. Repeated comments are more evident amongst students age 16 years and older. At least 26% of this group compared to 17% of the younger group have at least six or more comments about functioning below grade level.

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, the importance of poor academic performance as measured by grades, test scores, and retention was the subject of some debate. Borus and Carpenter (1984), Ekstrom (1986), and Wehlage and Rutter (1986) confirm that poor academic performance is a factor in leaving school early. Wehlage (1989) also examined academic performance as measured by standardized tests among students in special school programs and challenged the perception that at-risk youth lack academic ability. A study in Ontario also challenged this perception (Mackay et al., 1989).

Recognizing that the learning and living environments of students vary, standardized testing as a measurement of academic performance in the NWT school system has largely disappeared. Cumulative Files would seem to confirm that this practice has ceased as less than 30% of these files had some reference to standardized testing.

Most (83%) students interviewed are exposed to English in the home, and

- 71% of students from Dene/Metis households use a Dene language in the home,
- 92% of students from Inuit/Inuvialuit households use Inuktitut/Inuvialuktun in the home, and
- 85% of students say they understand and 79% are able to speak all of the languages used in the home.

Students say they understand the languages used in the school but the comments on the CUM Files indicate that school staff disagree. On 40% (78) of the Cumulative Files reviewed, reference was made to the student having trouble using and/or speaking English but only 11 of these students themselves indicate a lack of understanding of the language in use in the school. Over 83% (65) of those students who had a CUM File reference to difficulties with the English language indicate that their first language is an aboriginal language.

When English is the language of instruction, at least one research study suggests that failure to master the English language is linked directly to academic performance and is possibly the most important factor contributing to the risk of leaving school early (Brodinsky and Keough, 1989). Another study suggests that while aboriginal and non-aboriginal educators have this point of view, aboriginal students and parents, especially those living on reserves, disagree (Mackay et al., 1989). In the NWT, the use of and value accorded to aboriginal languages requires a broader view of the influence of language on academic performance. For example, research into bilingual education (Cummins, 1984) has found that a strong aboriginal language foundation supports the subsequent learning of English and the transferability of aboriginal language learning into English. The research further suggests that the non-English first language should be treated as an asset rather than as a handicap.

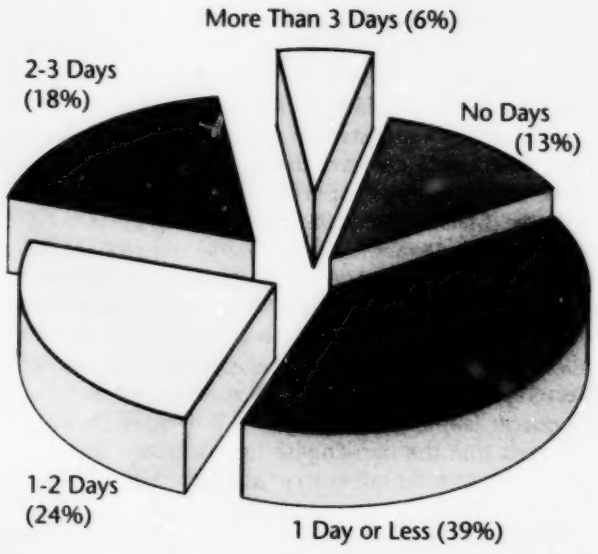
School staff observe that if the language of instruction changes, usually in Grade 3 or 4, this is the point at which students begin to experience difficulty in comprehension and in ability to keep up with the program. The fact that many NWT students at risk of leaving school early and those who have left school come from homes where an aboriginal language(s) is used, may support the need for stronger first language and bilingual education programming to deal with language problems identified by the schools.

Students at risk of leaving school early and early school leavers describe their performance in school as average or better than average. Cumulative Files and school staff indicate that students are having trouble using and/or speaking English.

Attendance

There are 190 instructional and 5 professional development days in the NWT school year. While attendance data can be skewed by many absences among a few students, the NWT student population attends school 85% of the time and among the schools participating in this research project, students attend school 78% of the time (Dept. of Education, GNWT). Only 13% of students interviewed attend school every day during an average week (Figure 22). Still, it is the view of most students (65%) that they are good or average attenders.

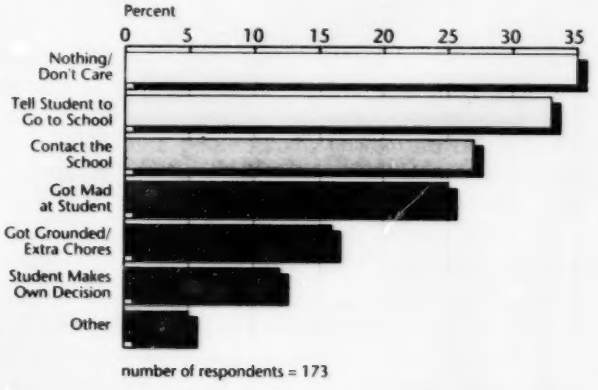
"Success in the NWT school system is based on regular attendance."
(research project Steering Committee member)



number of respondents = 195

Fig. 22: Days of School Missed in an Average Week as Reported by Students (by Percentage)

Most (93%) students say that adults in their household know when they miss school but a large proportion of students see adults doing nothing about the situation (Figure 23).



number of respondents = 173

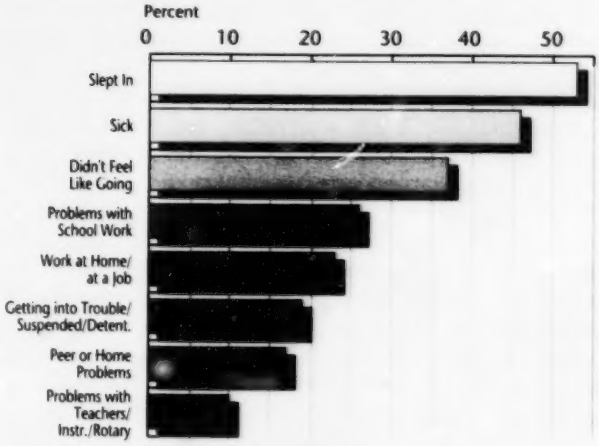
Fig. 23: Students' View of What Adults Do When They Miss School (by Percentage)

Parental/adult response does vary by cultural background.

- Dene/Metis students say that adults in their household most frequently get mad when they miss school.
- Inuit/Inuvialuit students say that nothing/don't care is most often the response when they miss school.
- Non-aboriginal students most frequently say that adults in their household contact the school when they miss days.

Students who are 16 years of age or older more frequently make their own decisions about attending school than do younger students.

Students cite a number of reasons for missing school and many are subject to interpretation. "Sleeping-in" is the main reason both students in and out of school give for missing school while the way in which the school functions or is run is a reason cited by the smallest number of students (Figure 24).



number of respondents = 189

Fig. 24: Reasons Why Students Miss School (by Percentage of Students)

Comments on attendance and academic performance are the most frequently reported data on Cumulative Files. Attendance is reported in terms of truancy, excused absences and being late for school.

- Over 60% of the files have a reference to student truancy and 63% of these have more than six references.
- 36% contain comments about excused absences and the incidence is greater on the files of students 15 years of age or younger. CUM File comments regarding excused absences (eg. on the land or travelling with parents) are more likely to occur on the files of aboriginal students. Dene students and particularly the male students, more often have multiple comments (i.e. greater than six) of this nature on their CUM Files.
- Over 45% of Cumulative Files refer to students being late for school and of these 49% have six or more comments of this nature. Almost 90% of these late references are recorded on CUM Files of aboriginal students and 50% of these files have six comments or more.
- While as many as 60% of CUM Files have comments about the student missing school, less than half (47%) of these CUM Files have references to the school contacting the home about the absences.

Local education authorities and the general public see poor school attendance patterns beginning in kindergarten. Community members believe there are three key factors which account for poor attendance:

- perceptions that school attendance is not compulsory,
- lack of enforcement of attendance, and
- lack of stigma attached to absences from school.

Local education authorities identify attendance policies and practices as one of their responsibilities. Encouraging regular/daily attendance is also a responsibility of individual teachers and School-Community Counsellors. Many NWT schools are encouraging regular attendance through team work involving the school and parents, and/or programs which serve as an incentive to draw students to school. Still, educators and administrators say more effective approaches to encourage regular attendance are needed. The general public and local education authorities agree but there is no consensus on approach. Some communities advocate policing (i.e. with a truancy officer), others prefer community liaison and education (i.e. promoting education in the community), and still others believe positive reinforcement is the answer (i.e. rewarding good attendance rather than punishing poor attendance).

Truancy has been studied as a general characteristic of behavioural problems of at-risk students (Bachman, Green, and Wirtanen, 1971), (Wehlage and Rutter, 1986). Student truancy is described (Wehlage et al., 1989) as a process of becoming estranged from school, passive and bored, and may be a symptom of a more serious condition(s). This 1989 study also found that if the context of schooling was changed to meet individual needs, the chronic truancy problem disappeared. Among aboriginal students in Ontario, absenteeism is the variable most associated with early school leaving (Mackay et al., 1989). However it has been found that clear and consistently applied expectations of behaviour and attendance, well-communicated to students, reduce truancy and improve the school climate (King et al., 1990).

Students at risk of leaving school early and early school leavers have poor attendance at school even though students say they are good attenders.

Making and Breaking School Rules

"The school should not be suspending people for fighting and being late, this achieves nothing. It is what the kids want." *(from a public forum)*

Students are more often involved in decision making and establishing the rules at school than in the home. At school, slightly more than half (57%) of the students say they sometimes or always participate in decisions and making rules. Still, more than half (54%) of the students who left school in the last 12 months and a high proportion of students (39%) still in school find/found school rules difficult to live with. Rules are one of the main reasons students don't like school (Table 7). Rules and such disciplinary actions as suspensions, expulsions and detentions are among the problems students experience most at school, and have contributed to students changing their attitude about school.

Table 7: What Students Don't Like About School

Things Students Don't Like About School	Age Group and Percentage (%) of Students 11-15 yrs.	16 yrs.	17+ yrs.	Total
Getting up in Morning/ Long hours/Too many days	65	61	56	61
Rules/Detentions/Too rigid	44	31	34	38
Boring	41	39	26	36
Teachers	30	31	34	32
Specific Subjects/ Homework/Exams	24	17	28	24
Unfriendly Place/Other Students/Uncomfortable	9	19	18	14
Don't Understand Language/ Have to Speak English	7	17	8	9
Other	2	3	2	2
	n = 96	n = 36	n = 61	n = 193

n = number of respondents

The research indicates that NWT male students have more difficulty with rules at school than do female students of the same age. Rules that pose(d) the most difficulty for students of all ages whether they are in or out of school or male or female, relate to eating, chewing gum/snuff or smoking in school. Rules related to being late or missing class seem to pose greater difficulty for older students than for those 15 years and younger while the reverse is true for rules which when broken, result in detentions and suspensions. Among aboriginal students in Ontario who have left school early, punctuality was cited as a rule which caused the greatest difficulty (Mackay et al., 1989).

About one-third (30%) of the students have CUM File references to discipline by suspension and expulsion and 56% have comments about poor or negative behaviour requiring discipline. Almost two-thirds (64%) of the CUM Files of students 15 years or younger and 48% of those 16 years or older contain these comments. While the percentages of students in and out of school with comments about negative behaviour are equal, those out of school developed a pattern of multiple comments (six or more) about their behaviour before leaving school. Of the 45% of students with comments on their CUM File

about negative behaviour requiring discipline, the students themselves say that their behaviour and subsequent discipline is a reason they feel differently about school, have a poor opinion of themselves in relation to other students, miss school, and/or think about quitting school.

Cumulative Files confirm that there are influences at work on the students which result in behavioural change. About half of the Cumulative Files indicate changes from positive to negative behaviour and 56% indicate changes from negative to positive behaviour. Of files containing comments about changes from negative and/or positive behaviour, 78% (77% of students in school and 81% of students out of school) have comments referring to both a change from negative to positive and positive to negative behaviour. This suggests that the same student may go through a series of behavioural changes while attending school or that teachers have different standards for judging changes in behaviour.

Parents, educators, and local education authorities agree that it is very difficult to discipline students/young people and that reprimands or use of the strap, are now construed as forms of mental or physical abuse. It is this environment which has created confusion and discord over the responsibility for discipline in the school, the home and the community. The situation has further been aggravated by a lack of common behavioural expectations requiring discipline. In some communities there may be a mix of social and economic influences which bias the behaviour of students and/or the reaction of the home or community. In other communities, "acceptable" behaviour, which varies according to culture, has led to some conflict between the school, home and community - and the student has been caught in the middle. Still in other communities the structure and system in place in the school is thought to be at the root of disciplinary concerns. For most, communications among these three environments which most affect the behaviour of young people - the home, school and community - are poor and require improvement.

"Students go from an unstructured home environment into a structured school situation and can't handle it. The clash of values and systems is just too much for most kids."

(a view frequently expressed by community members)

A study of the structure of schooling and school drop-outs (Calabrese, 1988) among ethnic/cultural groups, found that where there is a distinct cultural attitude to control, rigidity and conformity, these attitudes generate a pattern of negativity toward the school leading to alienation and early school leaving. Research on suspension policies in Boston middle schools (Wheelock, 1986) found that where there was a policy of suspension for behavioural or truancy problems, it became another contributing factor in the eventual 'pushout' of students.

Students at risk of leaving school early and those who have recently left school have difficulty with school rules and disciplinary actions.

Student Support

Among students who have left school in the last 12 months, less than half (44%) told the school that they were quitting, and of these less than half (44%) were aware of their schools doing anything to try to change their decision. In instances where schools tried to intervene to change the student's decision, students describe the main approach used as "talking". These circumstances are not unique to the NWT. Among early school leavers in Ontario's secondary schools, two-thirds did not speak to staff before leaving even though most left school during a term rather than during a break period (Sullivan, 1988). In this study fewer than one in three early school leavers who spoke with a staff person, felt that the person to whom they spoke tried very hard to get them to change their decision. This contrasts sharply with non-leavers contemplating leaving school who talked to a staff person about leaving. Among these non-leavers, two-thirds said that the person they spoke to tried very hard to encourage them to stay.

Cumulative Files seem to indicate that the school provides more support than the students suggest. In terms of academic support, over half (57%) of the CUM Files contain a reference to a program or action designed to meet student needs (eg. tutorial, remedial, special needs/ education classes/program, IEP program, homework program, mentorship/leadership program, and/or placement in an alternative program or other student support actions). Slightly less than half of the Cumulative Files have comments about referrals or extra help given to the student (eg. the School Team, IEP team, Special Needs Team, Interagency Team).

In discussions with school staff few articulate specific actions to identify and assist students at-risk. This may in part be attributed to the lack of a Territorial-wide definition of a student-at-risk. Some schools use a team approach to supporting students identified as chronically truant, having behavioural problems or demonstrating poor academic performance. The school team usually involves the school principal, special needs teacher, school community counsellor and classroom teacher. Team support for students may not however be noted on the Cumulative File. In some communities, interagency committees

involving the school have been struck to deal with individual student or broader social and special needs.

"The school community counsellor makes home visits and encourages parents to send their kids to school."
(statement from school staff)

Some local education authorities and school staff believe that classroom teachers are ill-equipped to deal with many student needs especially those which may result from chronic ear infections, fetal alcohol syndrome or other medical circumstances. In general there is a sense that most schools do not have the human or physical resources to assess and follow-up on special student needs. For example, there is some opinion that the system does not serve the needs of bright/gifted students but others maintain that the opposite is true. Among community individuals who are aware of Methods and Resources (M&R), Special Needs (SNT), Student Support (SST) and/or Program Support (PST) teachers, most see no change in the demands being made on classroom teachers or in the educational programs or services being provided to children as a result of the work of these specialists.

Community members feel that schools are weak in their ability to provide personal, family and career counselling. School staff also lament that career and personal counselling is a shortfall in the system. Because of a shortage of trained counsellors, counselling that is provided, is most often done so by the classroom teacher. Local education authorities note that in many incidences school staff endeavour to diagnose problems but there are few if any follow-up services/support. Reference to a poor quality of counselling is noted in other research on Canadian school leavers (Price Waterhouse, 1991). School leavers were critical of the counselling offered suggesting that it often represented nothing more than consultation regarding course schedules or timetables. In that study, counsellors were not seen as advisors interested in the student's school problems or decisions.

A very small number of students participating in this research project are enrolled in alternative programs. On 18% of the Cumulative Files, there are comments about the most commonly offered alternative program, the Community Occupational Program (COP). Comments about alternative programs are more numerous on CUM Files of students (29%) 16 years of age and older because they are the eligible students.

"Kids are often discouraged that they have to spend time learning things they can't apply or don't see as relevant. There is just too much emphasis on academic programming." *(from a public forum)*

Alternative programs such as the Community Occupational Program are offered in some schools in the Northwest Territories but there is mixed opinion about what these programs offer to students. For some community members, these programs are seen as successful in keeping students in school longer and providing effective job orientation. Others think that these programs are for potential early school leavers only. Views as to the effectiveness of these programs vary among educators and administrators and local education authorities within the same school. A view commonly raised in these debates is that alternative programs are contrary to the "mainstream" approach generally advocated for NWT schools. A review of the performance of at-risk students at 14 schools with special at-risk programs (Wehlage et al., 1989) found that 'matching' programs with the needs of students was fundamental to the success of both the program and the student. In other words, a variety of program offerings is essential in order to meet the diverse needs of a variety of students.

"The education system has to have broad horizons yet still recognize that family and community relationships will not change. The education system has to offer more options, more choices so kids can learn and parents can appreciate and respect their learning."
(from a public forum)

Early school leavers seem to fade out of school rather than quit. Among community members there are conflicting views about both the quantity and effectiveness of various student support measures.

School-Home-Community Relations

"There is a great need for improved communications between the home and school. There is a need to work toward common goals. There is a need to communicate when things are going well as well as the problems."
(a frequently stated view of the general public)

Even though most students (80%) believe that their parents and/or adults in their household are helpful toward their education, over two-thirds (69%) of the students say that their parents or other adults in their household never contact the school or only contact the school when requested (Figure 25).

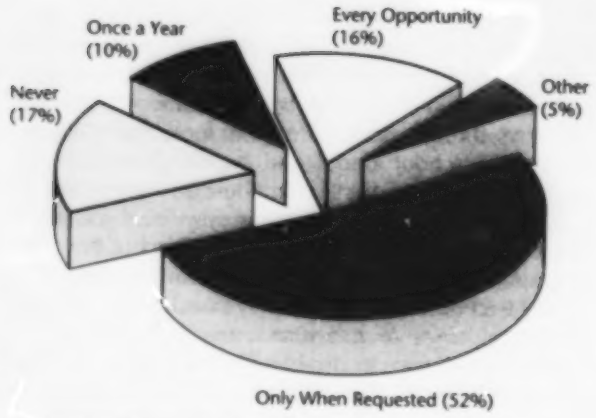


Fig. 25: Students' Perception of Adult and/or Parental Contact with the School in the Past Year (by Percentage)

Parents/adults in the households of students 16 years of age and older and of non-aboriginal students are more likely to contact the school "at every opportunity" than are parents in other households. Among students who don't live with their mother and/or father, 32% of these students say that adults in their household never contact the school.

About 33% of the Cumulative Files indicate positive, and 14% comment on negative, involvement of/ communication by parents with the school. Less than 30% of Cumulative Files contain references to the school contacting the home regarding specific programs or actions recommended to meet student needs. There are few if any comments by parents recorded on Cumulative Files and virtually none by students themselves. During informal discussions with educators, many suggest that parents most frequently contact the school to pick up report cards or to participate in parent/teacher interviews.

Some local education authorities admit that the parents of students who are doing well in school are more frequently involved in school activities and come to the school on a more regular basis. Parents who come to school only when their child is in trouble tend to blame the teachers and the school rather than share in the responsibility. Poor communications between the home/ community and the school are attributed to some extent, to contact being made only in negative situations. Some community members wonder why schools do not share the "good news" as well as the bad.

"Parents come to school monthly to participate in an awards program for good attendance and behaviour. Slowly this is increasing community participation in the school."
(from a public forum)

Home-school contact and involvement is well documented as fundamental to students' success in school (Henderson, 1987). In at least one other study (Mackay et al., 1989) aboriginal students and parents, and educators believe that the quality and quantity of home-school communications is poor, mainly due to a lack of will and commitment among these parties.

Among students at risk of leaving school early and those who have recently left school, parental/guardian contact with the school is low.

School Sponsored Extracurricular Activities

Most students (84%) say that they participate(d) in special activities offered through the school. Sports and dances are the most popular of these activities. The type and level of participation in school sponsored activities does not vary between students living in small or large communities. Lack of interest is the main reason the few students in large and small communities don't participate in school activities. It is difficult to confirm the participation of students in school sponsored activities as few Cumulative Files (17%) contain comments about these activities.

Although many schools offer some of the best facilities and resources in the community, the range of school sponsored extracurricular activities varies. The time, enthusiasm and commitment of school staff and community volunteers, and the availability of financial resources are most frequently the variables which shape the nature and extent of these activities. These conditions may also shape the extent to which the school does or must act alone to achieve an active student membership.

The participation of NWT students in school activities seems to contradict other research into early school leaving. A lack of student involvement in school activities is described (Price Waterhouse, 1991) as the beginning of a process which eventually leads to leaving school early. Early school leavers are described as trying and failing to get involved or never attempting to join activities. In contrast to the school leaver group, those continuing in school generally participate in a wide range of structured and unstructured activities. King (1988) and Wehlage (1989) also describe the importance of school membership and the social bonds which connect the student to the school. (Social bonding describes a situation in which the student is attached, committed, involved and has a belief in the norms, activities and people of the school, regardless of how unappealing the rules may be.)

Students at risk of leaving school early and early school leavers actively participate in school activities.

Other School-Related Factors

The Rotary System:
In literature on early school leaving in North America, the rotary system of students moving from classroom to classroom is a factor that may contribute to early school leaving. NWT students interviewed do not see the rotary system as a particular concern.

Most smaller community schools do not rotate students from one classroom to another. If rotation does occur, more often teachers move or students move for one or two classes only (eg. for Physical Education or Home Economics/Shop). In urban schools rotation is more likely to occur because of the large student population and the range of program offerings. In these cases, the public views the rotary system as undermining the student's sense of belonging.

Classroom Size:
NWT schools are allocated teachers based on the ratio of 19 students to 1 teacher in elementary and junior high schools and a 16 to 1 ratio in high schools. The perception of the Pupil Teacher Ratio (PTR) and the actual class sizes varies across the NWT.

Comments on Cumulative Files about the size of classes were infrequent. Among some teaching staff in smaller communities, there is a perception that the PTR is too high to effectively instruct second language learners, and is frequently too high for Grades 7 to 9 where special effort has to be made to prepare students for another school and lifestyle. Reading, writing and speaking in English is for many teachers, one of the main areas requiring special attention.

While the general public admits to a lack of understanding of the day-to-day operations of the schools, there is a perception at least in smaller communities, that the PTR is too high because the needs of all children are not being met. Members of the public wonder how teachers can work with students all of whom have special needs or may function at different levels. In some communities, particularly those with successful adult education experiences, individualized or small group learning is seen as an approach which should be used to build generic skills and confidence and it is an approach which responds well to the needs of students whose first language is not English.

Change in Schools:
Due to the lack of senior high school grades in most NWT communities and among more than half of the schools participating in this research project, it is not surprising that the frequency of comments on the student changing schools increases with students 16 years of age or older. Overall half of the Cumulative Files indicate that the student has changed schools. 53% of those in school had references to school changes compared to 42% of those out of school. Students can experience serious disorientation after moving away from a community of peers who provided social identity (Wehlage et al., 1989) (Mackay et al., 1989).

FACTORS IN THE PERSONAL LIVES OF STUDENTS

The Student...
- Uses Alcohol
- Has Been Exposed to Suicide
- Has Unrealistic Expectations for the Future
- Is Clear About the Value and Purpose of Education
- Has Strong / Influential Peer Relationships

Factors in the personal lives of students which may be associated with early school leaving are discussed under the following sub-headings: attitudes about school and expectations for the future, self-esteem, peer relationships, leisure time, use of alcohol, drugs and solvents, and suicide.

Student Expectations for the Future

About 90% of students participating in the research believe that finishing high school is important (84% are students who are no longer in school and 92% are students who are in school). Finishing high school is important because NWT students want to:

- get a good job,
- have more choices,
- have a better life,
- be independent, and
- earn lots of money.

Students (96%) in both small and large communities believe that if they complete Grade 12 they will be able to live the kind of life they want. They believe high school graduation would enable them to get a good job, or to know/do/enjoy more. Over three-quarters (78%) of students in school and 64% of those out of school believe that they can achieve Grade 12. Most students (81%) in large centres compared to 68% in small communities believe they can achieve Grade 12. For students who believe that they cannot achieve Grade 12, this opinion is based mainly on the fact that they have or are going to drop out of school, or that (school) work is too difficult.

Whether in or out of school, only 7% of students do not know what kind of work they would like to do in the future. Students see themselves working in a variety of different occupations and economic sectors. Perhaps as a result of jobs or information available in the community, jobs in the service, transportation and health/medical industries are preferred by most students.

In the future, most students believe that they will support themselves and their families by working full or part-time for wages. This is the view of 80% of students in school and 62% of students who are no longer in school. A small number of students (18%) identify hunting/trapping/fishing/crafts/art activities as the way that they will support themselves and their families in the future. A higher number of these students have already left the school system.

The vast majority of students participating in at risk research outside the NWT are also clearly aware of the positive relationship between education and better career opportunities (King et al., 1990). Most expect to graduate, attend university/college or go directly to work. That research also found that although students know what they want after secondary school few have clearly focused plans.

NWT students at risk of leaving school early and those who have recently left school have high and perhaps unrealistic, expectations for the future. They expect to achieve a high school education, work mainly in the service, transportation and health/medical industries, and support themselves and/or families with wage employment.

Self Esteem

About two-thirds of NWT students participating in the research describe themselves as "happy" and "friendly". Few would change anything about their personal lives (Table 8).

Table 8: One Thing Students Would Change About Their Personal Life

One Thing Students Want to Change	PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS Students In School	Students Out of School
Nothing/Don't Know	31	31
Change My Appearance/Personality	18	8
Stay in School/Return to School	7	12
Stay Out of Trouble/Change Reputation/ Quit Drinking/Quit Doing Drugs/ Have No Problems	8	10
Have More Friends/Tell Friends My Problems	8	2
Would Have More Money/PT Job Move/Have Own Place	9	6
Change It All/Have a Better Life/ Be More Active/Involved	9	10
Wouldn't Be Self Conscious	4	2
Work Out Relationship with Boy/Girl Friend	0	8
Other	6	10
n = number of respondents	n = 119	n = 49

While both male and female students would describe themselves to others as friendly and happy (Figure 26), female students are more likely to describe themselves as shy and overweight and male students are more likely to describe themselves as physically fit and a bit too skinny.

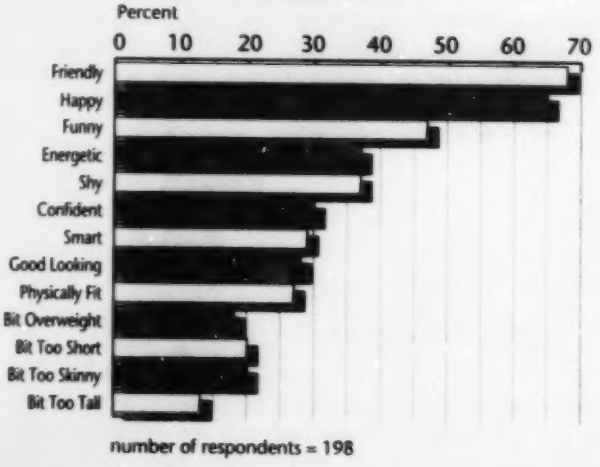


Fig. 26: How Students Would Describe Themselves to Others (by Percentage)

Students were asked to describe how they see themselves, on a three-point scale of 'mostly', 'sometimes' and 'rarely'. Students more often choose positive rather than negative

attributes to describe themselves. The strongest held opinion among students (58%) relates to an ability to get along with people most of the time (Figure 27).

The way that male and female students of the same cultural background see themselves varies.

- Compared to female Dene/Metis students, male students from the same background more frequently see themselves as mostly able to get along with people, having lots of physical energy, and able to make things with their hands. Compared to male students of a similar cultural background, female Dene/Metis students more often see themselves as able to finish things, a person who worries, and able to express feelings.
- Compared to female students of the same cultural background, male Inuit/Inuvialuit students more frequently see themselves as mostly having lots of physical energy, able to speak in a group, likely to try to think up new ideas, able to make things with their hands, and able to make decisions. Female Inuit/Inuvialuit students compared to male students of the same cultural background more frequently describe themselves as mostly being a person who worries, able to express feelings, and wishing they were someone else.
- Compared to female students of the same background, non-aboriginal male students more frequently describe themselves as mostly having lots of physical energy, able to make things with their hands, a person others like to be with, and able to make decisions. Relative to male students, non-aboriginal female students more often describe themselves as able to get along with people, a person who worries a lot, a person who likes to be alone, able to think up new ideas, and wishing they were someone else.

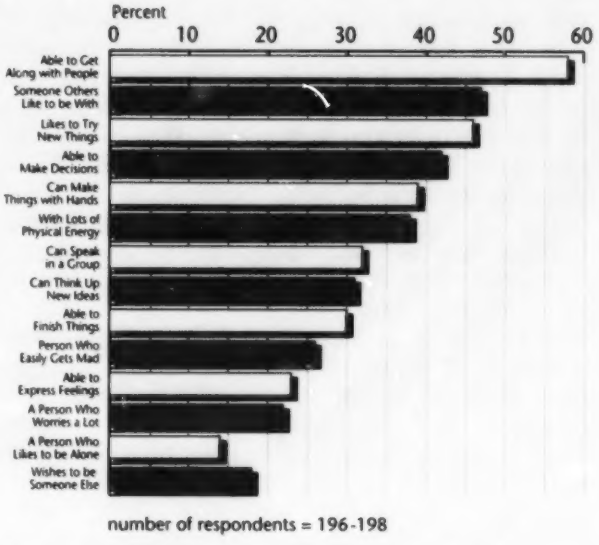


Fig. 27: How Students Mostly See Themselves (by Percentage)

Two-thirds or more of students believe that most of their friends and peers see them as fun to be with, helpful, trustworthy, having time for them, dressing nicely and having a healthy physical appearance (Figure 28). Generally, students indicate that their friends/peers have a more positive view of them than perhaps they do of themselves.

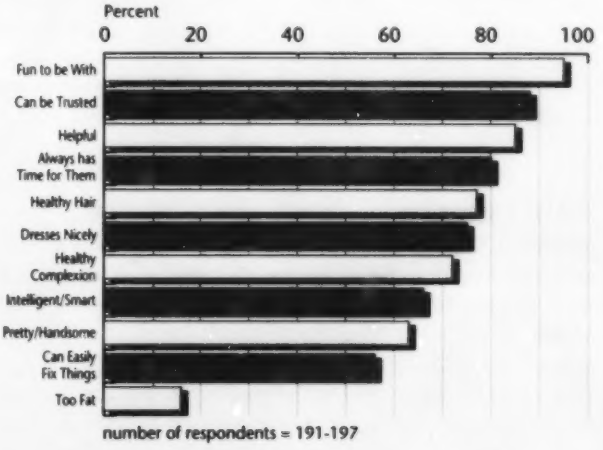


Fig. 28: How Students Think Most of Their Friends and People Their Own Age See Them (by Percentage)

References to positive self-esteem are recorded on over 65% of the Cumulative Files and comments about negative self-esteem are recorded on 55% of the files. References to both positive and negative self-esteem appear on 46% of the CUM Files. Students over 16 years of age and those out of school have fewer references to negative self-esteem recorded on their files compared to younger students and those in school. Among younger students,

12% have in excess of 11 references to negative self-esteem. 85% of Dene and Inuvialuit students have comments about their positive self-esteem on their CUM Files. While slightly less than 50% of the CUM Files of Inuit students have references to negative self-esteem, more than 50% of those with comments are likely to have more than six.

The social and interpersonal strengths that students describe together with information from CUM Files suggest that students would be able to get along with teachers/principals. 45% of the Cumulative Files indicate that students are respectful of the adults they come in contact with compared to 31% indicating disrespect for adults. Still, relationships with teachers/principals are identified as a problem students have at school.

The generally positive view that students have of themselves is reflected in the Cumulative Files. However it is a view that is not readily shared by community members, is inconsistent with other information rendered by students (i.e. with respect to problems at home, contemplation of suicide, or use of substances), and is contrary to other research which has been undertaken in the NWT. In the *Canadian Health Attitudes and Behaviours Survey* (King et al., 1984), a high proportion of Grade 7's and 10's in the NWT indicated that they wished they were someone else and a low proportion said that they made friends easily.

NWT students at risk of leaving school and those no longer in school report having positive self-esteem. Most view themselves or believe that other people see them as happy, friendly, able to get along with others, fun to be with, trustworthy and helpful.

Peer Relationships

Students (69%) most frequently say they have one or no best friend but lots or some other friends. Students who have left school are more likely to have a boy/girl friend and no best friend(s) than those in school. Female students are more likely to have a boyfriend than are males students to have a girlfriend.

NWT students identify the influence of peer relationships in the school as both positive and negative. For example, seeing friends is the most attractive element about school but on the other hand, students who see their academic performance as being worse than others, have made this judgement to some extent because they are "always being picked on by other students". A small number of students cite the fact that friends started to skip/leave school or that they are "picked on by other kids" as a reason for missing school and among 11% of students in school and out of school, these two factors are given as considerations in decisions to quit school. The participation of friends is also a secondary reason for non-participation in extracurricular activities offered through the school.

The influence of peers has not received much attention in other at-risk research. It is unclear to what extent a student's friends and peers influence the decision to leave school (Rumberger, 1987). Most NWT students interviewed have friends who go to school and friends who are no longer in school. Three-quarters of the students interviewed seem unconcerned about whether their friends go to school or have left school. Over two-thirds (68%) say that friends who are out of school encourage them to stay in school. However a significant portion of students suggest that friends who are out of school have less positive impacts on them. For example, one-third or more of the students say that friends who are out of school encourage them to skip school, ask them to go places during school hours and/or encourage them to stay-up late. The tendency of out of school friends to encourage students to stay up late is greater in small communities than in larger centres. Another more subtle impact of friends who are out of school may be the stories they tell about the "good life" outside of school (Figure 29).

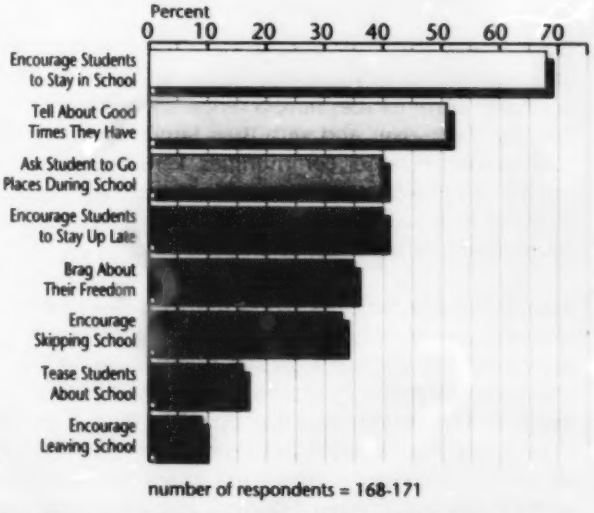


Fig. 29: Impact of Friends Who Are Out of School on Students (by Percentage)

Most (70%) students say that they sometimes feel lonely and another 9% say that they feel lonely often or all of the time. Peer relationships help students to deal with loneliness. When students are lonely, most (57%) would visit friends or go for a walk (35%).

In the absence of strong family relationships and/or connections with the community and its institutions, peer relationships and associated pressures are seen by community members as the most important element in

the personal lives of young people. Some schools have begun to use peer relationships as a way of dealing with social and academic problems students may have at school. Examples of these initiatives include peer support groups, house leagues, the buddy-system, and reading programs involving younger and older students.

Peer relationships are important to NWT students at risk of leaving school early and those who have recently left school. Peer relationships influence attitudes about school, how students see themselves, use of leisure time and use of substances.

Leisure Time

More than one-third (37%) of students interviewed do not belong to any sports, cultural or recreational organizations in their community and 16% do not participate in special activities (extracurricular activities) offered through the school. The main reason for non-participation in school sponsored activities is lack of interest. Involvement in community organizations seems to be largely in sports organizations. The highest level of participation in school activities is in team sports and dances/plays/concerts.

Students say that they usually spend most of their free time with friends or watching TV/movies. Male students in smaller communities have a tendency to spend more time by themselves and with their family than do their counterparts in larger communities. Female students in smaller communities tend to spend more of their free time involved in a range of activities as compared to their counterparts in larger communities.

If students had a choice as to how to spend their free time, students would not change the amount of time they spend with friends but a greater number would like to spend more of their leisure time with family and friends on the land, and/or with their grandparents. Also, a greater number of students would like to spend less time watching TV, and playing video games at the arcade. Virtually none of the students interviewed say they spend their free time participating in community activities and none suggested that this would be a desirable use of their leisure time.

Students at risk of leaving school early and those who have recently left school spend most of their leisure time with friends or watching television.

Use of Alcohol, Drugs and Solvents

Half of the students interviewed say that they have not used alcohol in the past 12 months and 43% say they never drink alcohol (Figure 30). Students out of school are more likely to have drunk alcohol in the last 12 months than those in school. Similarly students 16 years of age and older, and Dene/Metis and non-aboriginal students are more likely to have used alcohol in the last 12 months than younger students and Inuit/Inuvialuit students. Most students who use alcohol tend to drink with friends rather than with family members or other people in the community. Almost two-thirds of students (64%) who drink say that they drink to get high, have fun or have a good time. The patterns of alcohol use seem to vary little between students residing in small and large communities.

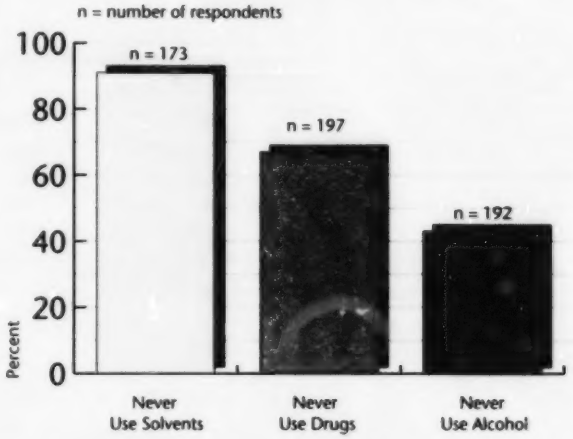


Fig. 30: Non-Use of Alcohol, Drugs and Solvents (by Percentage of Students)

NWT students indicate that patterns of drug and solvent use are different than those for alcohol use. Most students (91%) say they never use solvents or haven't used them in the last 12 months (Figure 30). About two-thirds (67%) say they never use drugs or haven't used drugs in the last 12 months (Figure 30). Younger Inuit/Inuvialuit and students residing in small communities are more likely to use solvents than other students. Like alcohol, students most frequently use drugs and solvents with friends but with the use of these substances there is a greater tendency to use them by oneself. The motivation to use drugs is similar to alcohol - students use drugs to get high, have fun or have a good time. Students who sniff are more likely to do so because "there is nothing else to do". A recent study reported that drug use amongst Grade 7 students in the NWT was higher than the Canadian average, while use amongst Grade 10 students was well above the national average (King et al. 1984).

Students still in school do not suggest that the use of drugs, alcohol or sniffing solvents causes them to miss school, change their attitude towards school, make them get behind in their work, or think about quitting school. Those out of school do not indicate that their use of drugs was a factor in their leaving school. Still, in questions asked about the home, half of the students say that their use and/or another household member's use of these substances has had a negative affect on their schooling.

Among NWT students at risk of leaving school early and those who have recently left school, alcohol is frequently used but students seem unclear about what impact this has on their schooling.

Suicide

Students in one of the ten communities participating in the research were not asked about suicide due to the fear of negative consequences or a reluctance among students to deal with the subject. Still, 44% of students say they have tried or thought about committing suicide (Figure 31). Difficulty dealing with problems in general or family problems in particular are the main reasons for attempts/ contemplation of suicide.

A very high proportion of students (87%) interviewed have known someone who has committed or tried to commit suicide, and the incidence varies little between large and small communities (Figure 31). The experience of someone else's suicide and/or suicide attempt has caused students to feel angry, hurt, sorry and helpless.

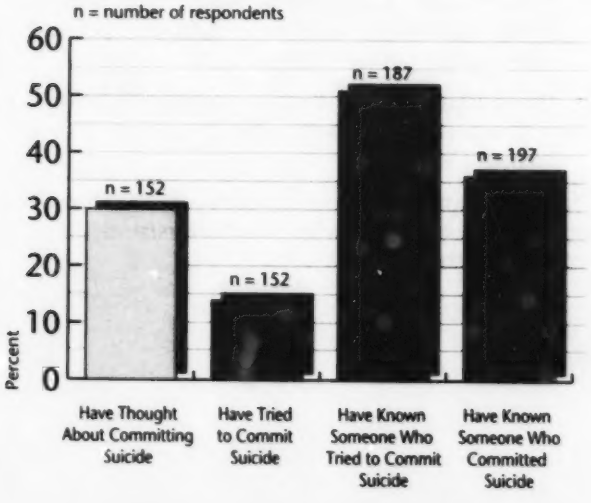


Fig. 31: Students' Experience with Suicide (by Percentage)

If students had a serious problem, about three-quarters (74%) would be likely to talk to someone rather than keep it inside. This response is consistent by gender, age, and cultural group. Among these students, most (90%) would talk to a close friend, parent(s) or family member rather than a professional (i.e. minister/priest, teacher, school counsellor, leader) in the community.

Students who would keep a serious problem inside rather than talk to someone, are more likely to do nothing about the problem or to get angry. These data seem somewhat inconsistent with the responses of those students who have tried or contemplated committing suicide. Less than half (47%) of these students asked for or received help to deal with their thoughts or attempts to commit suicide.

Suicide is prevalent in the lives of early school leavers and students at risk of leaving school early - 44% of students have thought about/tried to commit suicide and 87% have known someone who has tried to commit/committed suicide.

THE OPINIONS OF HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATES

The collection of some baseline data on the opinions of students at risk of leaving school early and those who have already left school early allows for the comparison of their views with those of other groups including high school graduates. The Department of Education (1989) surveyed students enrolled in Grade 12 then conducted a follow-up survey with the same students one year following their graduation. One of the purposes of the survey was to collect student perceptions and attitudes about their high school education. This survey is relevant as it was a primary reason for not involving students who are perceived as "successful" in school in this research project. Some of the key findings of that survey were:

- Overall, Grade 12 students had very positive feelings regarding their high school experiences and toward the value and importance of their education.
- Two main concerns students had about their high school education were: the availability of courses for their high school program, and related to this, the academic counselling they received in choosing their courses.
- Grade 12 students felt that their school helped prepare them for future education, employment, and life in general.
- Most Grade 12 students plan to continue their education in the next year through post-secondary education, or by continuing in high school.
- Parents most often play a strong role in influencing and guiding the future plans of students.
- The experience students gain while travelling away from home, is seen as playing an important part in shaping the future plans of many Grade 12 students in the NWT.
- School more often plays an influencing and/or guiding role in the future plans of aboriginal students, than it does for non-aboriginal students.
- Most aboriginal students in Grade 12 have achieved a higher level of education than did their parents.
- One third (34%) of the Grade 12 students agreed with the statement "school is boring".
- One third (32%) stated they "would rather go to school in a different community".
- Most students (86%) disagreed with the statement "they would rather work at a job than come to school."
- Older Grade 12 students more often expressed dissatisfaction with "rules and regulations" (39%) than did younger students (27%).
- Grade 12 students most often expressed dissatisfaction with academic counselling for choosing high school courses (34%).

Table 9 compares the views about education of NWT high school graduates and early school leavers/students at risk of leaving school early.

Table 9: Comparison of the Opinions of NWT Early School Leavers/Students at Risk of Leaving School Early and High School Graduates

	Graduates	At Risk and Early School Leavers
High Value and Importance Given to Education	Agree	Agree
Concern About Courses Available	Agree	Disagree
Education Prepares Them for the Future	Agree	Agree
One-third of Students Believe School is Boring	Agree	Agree
Rather Go to School Than to a Job	Agree	Agree
Older Students are More Dissatisfied with School Rules	Agree	Disagree

Note: This table summarizes the results of *similar* questions asked in this research and in the Department of Education's graduate survey.

SUMMARY OF KEY FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO EARLY SCHOOL LEAVING IN THE NWT

"Everyone should have a job to do toward the student's education. The gaps have to be bridged."
(from a public forum)

It is evident from the research findings that the profile of the early school leaver is a complex set of relationships which touch the community, home, school and personal lives of students in the NWT. A summary of the key factors contributing to early school leaving in the NWT are provided in Table 10.

Table 10: Key Factors Contributing to Early School Leaving in the NWT

Community Factors
- Students are uncertain about the quality of community life.
- Students are uncertain about their own future in their communities.
- Community members are dissatisfied with/uncertain about their input into and control of education.
- Students are clear about the value and purpose of education.
- Community members seem to be unclear about the value and purpose of education.
- There is insufficient community support for education.

Home Factors
- Students live in average or larger than average-sized households.
- Students' households have poor economic circumstances.
- Students have to work at home.
- Wage employment is sometimes more important than going to school.
- Students don't participate in household decision making.
- Students don't expect discipline at home.
- Students live in troubled home environments (eg. abuse, neglect, substance abuse).
- Parental/guardian contact with the school is low.

School Factors
- Students have problems with school work, teachers and school rules.
- Students have likely failed a grade(s).
- Students spend their time at school working at their desks or listening to teachers rather than working co-operatively in small groups or with other students.
- Students are poor attenders.
- Students seem to fade out of school rather than quit.
- Parental/guardian contact with the school is low.

Personal Factors
- Students have high and perhaps unrealistic expectations for their future.
- Students are influenced by peer relationships.
- Students use alcohol.
- Suicide is prevalent in the lives of students.

As found in other research the interplay of many factors, rather than one or a few specific factors, likely cause

students to "fade out" of the education system over a long period of time. The challenge facing all partners in education is to examine their own roles and responsibilities for education in light of the implications of this research. The expressed views and experiences of students who have recently left school in the NWT and those who appear to be at risk of leaving school early, do not always agree with the opinions of other education partners. Nevertheless this report should provide "lessons for all".

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